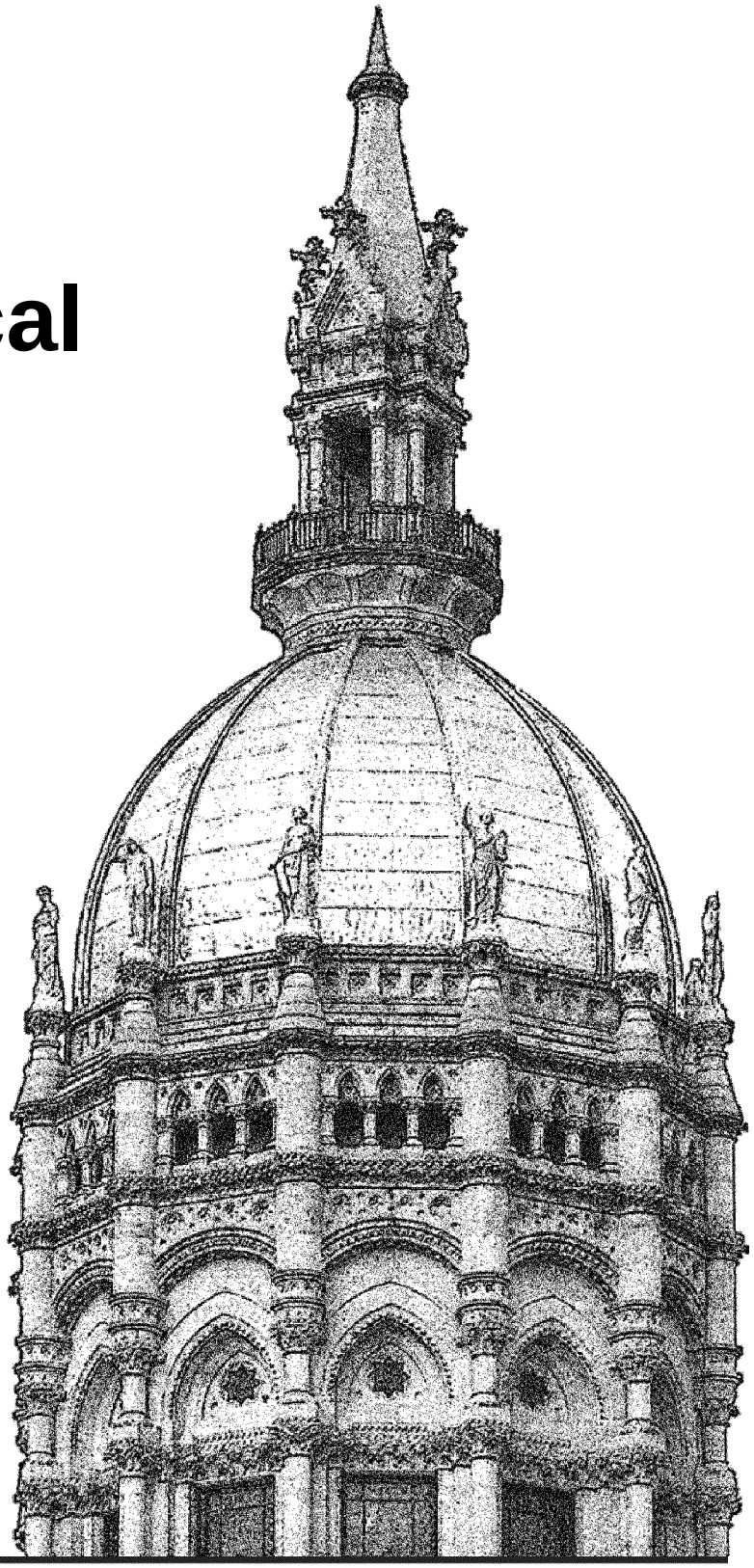
Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education

December 2015



PRI

Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

Connecticut General Assembly

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE

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DECEMBER 2015

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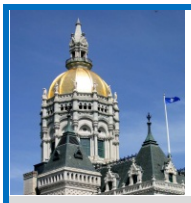

PRI Study Highlights

December 2015

Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education

Background

In April 2015, the PRI committee authorized this study to examine the prevalence, advantages, and disadvantages of regional cooperation and identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding beneficial efforts.

Regional cooperation between boards of education refers to the voluntary joint provision of services, programs, activities, or operations. Cooperative efforts can occur between two or more school districts, between school districts and regional educational service centers (RESCs), or between school districts and other entities such as the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

Regional cooperative efforts vary widely, from two school districts arranging to share a bus route or football team, to the creation of a regional school district serving children in grades K-12. PRI examined nearly 90 collaborative efforts that could occur within three instructional categories (special education, general education, and professional development) and three operational categories (pupil transportation, administrative and back office functions, and cooperative purchasing). Agri-science centers, designated high schools, and formal cooperative arrangements pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a, were also examined.

Because there is no centralized place where information on regional cooperation between school districts is collected, PRI staff developed a database of such information. A key source of this information was structured telephone interviews with 56 (46 percent) of the 122 superintendents of non-regional K-12 school districts. Additional information was also obtained from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs), and the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO).

Main Findings

Almost all school districts studied participated in at least one cooperative effort in each of the three instructional categories of general education, special education, and professional development. Also:

- **Smaller school districts cooperate in relatively more instructional areas** than larger school districts; however, **there are also many cooperative efforts occurring in middle sized school districts**
- Depending on the school district's' geographic area, RESCs played a larger or smaller role in certain special education areas.
- School districts in more affluent communities are less likely to partner for physical therapy, occupational therapy, or psychological services.

With the exception of pupil transportation, **there were generally fewer partnerships between educational entities in the operational areas**:

- Nearly three-quarters of school districts collaborated on special education pupil transportation
- **School districts are more likely to partner with local municipalities for cooperative purchasing** of such items as heating oil/gas, and health insurance.
- **School districts are more likely to partner with local municipalities for administrative and back office functions** such as snowplowing, grounds maintenance, and auditing.

Superintendents identified **factors used in deciding whether to form or continue a collaboration including whether effort**:

- saves money or contains costs
- results in efficiencies or improves quality of services
- satisfies a need of the school district
- benefits all collaborating parties
- benefits or positively impacts students
- logistics can be worked out
- meets the needs of local control, politics, and good relationships
- to collaborate is known by the school district

PRI Recommendations

Share more information. Publicize collaborative opportunities in training, ride-sharing, and food services. Provide information on special education membership model, and software licensing and hosting rates.

Create financial incentives. Cover start-up costs of new cooperative efforts.

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Acronyms

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ACES	Area Cooperative Educational Services, a RESC serving the southcentral part of the state
ACIR	Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
ASTE	Agricultural Science and Technology Education
AT	Assistive Technology
BOE	Board of Education
C.E.S.	Cooperative Educational Services, a RESC serving the southwest part of the state
CABE	Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
CAPSS	Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
CAS	Connecticut Association of Schools
CASBO	Connecticut Association of School Business Officials
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CEA	Connecticut Education Association
CIRMA	Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency
COG	Council of Governments
COSTA	Connecticut School Transportation Association
CREC	Capitol Region Education Council, a RESC serving the northcentral part of the state
CSDE	Connecticut State Department of Education
CTHSS	Connecticut Technical High School System
EASTCONN	RESC serving the northeast region of the state
ESA	Educational Services Agency
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
GED	General Equivalency Diploma
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IT	Information Technology
LEARN	RESC serving the southeastern part of the state
MORE Commission	Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies Commission
OPM	Office of Policy and Management
OT	Occupational Therapy
PD	Professional Development
PT	Physical Therapy
RESC	Regional Educational Service Center
RSD	Regional School District
SBE	State Board of Education
SERC	State Education Resource Center
SRO	School Resource Officer

Executive Summary

Regional Cooperation Between Boards of Education

Regional cooperation between boards of education refers to the joint, voluntary provision of services, programs, activities, or operations. Cooperative activities can vary widely, from two school districts arranging to share a bus route or a director of special education, to the creation of a regional school district serving children in grades K-12 or a group of districts jointly running an adult education program for interested adults from multiple towns.

Cooperative activities are often undertaken based on an assumption that the programs and services will be provided at a reduced cost compared to each school district individually providing the service or program, or at the very least, that the collaboration will contain future costs. It is important to note that in addition to any financial advantages, cooperative efforts may expand an individual school's course offerings or programs, or provide other non-economic benefits.

Historically, cooperation between boards of education was first authorized statutorily through a special act establishing the Regional High School District Number 1 of Litchfield County in 1937.[1] Then, in addition to developing a statutory scheme for the formation of additional regional school districts,[2] the legislature in 1949 authorized individual districts to share superintendents.[3] The 1960s saw the evolution of the statute authorizing shared superintendents and multi-district supervisory units into one allowing "cooperative arrangements" to carry out any of the statutory duties of boards of education (BOE).[4] As recently as 2010, the legislature further clarified that any board of education can partner with other boards of education or municipalities to establish shared service agreements with no formal requirements other than that such agreements be documented in writing.[5]

In April 2015, the PRI committee authorized this study of regional cooperation between local boards of education (Appendix A). The purpose of the study was to examine the prevalence, advantages, and disadvantages of cooperative efforts, and to identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding beneficial ones.

Because there is no centralized place where information on regional cooperation between school districts is collected, PRI staff developed a database of such information. A key source of data was structured telephone interviews with 56 (46 percent) of the 122 superintendents of non-regional K-12 school districts. Additional information was also obtained from the Connecticut State Department of Education, Connecticut's six regional educational service centers, the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, and other organizations.

[1] Special Act 37-428.
[2] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-39 *et seq.*
[3] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-158.
[4] C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a. The evolution and application of the "cooperative arrangement" statute is further addressed in Chapter 7.
[5] C.G.S. Sec. 10-239k.

Prevalence of Regional Cooperation

For purposes of this study, regional cooperation is organized into six categories of school district activity, three instructional categories and three operational categories. The three instructional categories are: special education, general education, and professional development. The three operational categories are: transportation, administrative and back office functions, and cooperative purchasing.

Instructional categories. PRI found almost all school districts studied participated in at least one cooperative effort in each of the three instructional categories of general education, special education, and professional development. PRI also found smaller school districts cooperated in relatively more instructional areas than larger school districts; however, there were also many cooperative efforts occurring in middle sized school districts.

Depending on a school district's geographic area, RESCs play a larger or smaller role in certain special education areas. School districts in more affluent communities were less likely to partner with RESCs for physical therapy, occupational therapy, or psychological services.

Operational categories. With the exception of pupil transportation, where PRI found nearly three-quarters of school districts collaborated on special education pupil transportation, there were generally fewer partnerships between educational entities in the operational areas. School districts were more likely to partner with local municipalities for cooperative purchasing of such items as heating oil/gas and health insurance. PRI also found school districts more likely to partner with local municipalities for administrative and back office functions such as snowplowing, grounds maintenance, and auditing.

Factors Influencing Formation of Cooperative Efforts

Superintendents identified the following factors used in deciding whether to form or continue a cooperative effort:

1. Does it save money or contain costs?
2. Does it result in efficiencies or improve quality of service?
3. Does it satisfy a need of the school district?
4. Does it benefit all collaborating parties?
5. Does it benefit or positively impact students?
6. Can the logistics be worked out?
7. Does it meet the needs of local control, politics, and good relationships?
8. Is the collaboration known by the school district?

Barriers to Replicating and Expanding Advantageous Regional Cooperative Efforts

Overall, PRI found that school districts need better access to information about successful models of regional cooperation. For example, a successful collaborative model in special education has not been widely publicized, and doing so might encourage other school districts to consider replicating the model. Some school districts have realized cost saving in shared transportation to out-of-district destinations for both special education and general education

students; however, many districts are lacking a structured way to communication potential opportunities to share rides to out-of-district destinations.

PRI also found no centralized, readily accessible location for publicizing professional development training to school districts. This may prevent districts from taking advantage of a potentially beneficial training opportunity for certified or non-certified staff. Potential cost savings for districts sharing software licensing or hosting are not readily known to school districts because there is no centralized listing of what opportunities exist and whether they are available statewide or within individual RESC catchment areas. Sometimes misinformation prevents school districts from considering regional cooperation, as was the case with confusion about whether school districts are permitted to share food service directors or fully share food service operations.

Apart from a lack of readily available and accurate information, another potential barrier to expanding advantageous regional cooperative efforts is a scarcity of funding ("seed money") for start-up costs to establish new special education regional cooperative programs or services.

Recommendations

Based on this study of regional cooperation between local boards of education, the committee makes six recommendations:

1. **Have CSDE publicize the benefits of the special education program membership model as a way to promote replication of these models in Connecticut.**

2. **Legislature should consider either establishing a new grant or loan program to provide (seed) money for start-up costs for new cooperative efforts among local boards of education, or resume funding of the Technical Assistance for Regional Cooperation grants (C.G.S. Sec. 10-262t) to support plans that implement cost-saving strategies.**

3. **In coordination with SERC, the RESC Alliance should develop and publicize a comprehensive list of training opportunities for school personnel. The opportunities would include both special education and general education topics sponsored or planned by school districts, RESCs, SERC, and other entities, that are open to other school districts.**

4. **RESCs should look for structured ways to facilitate communication between districts about opportunities to share rides to out-of-district destinations.**

5. **CSDE should disseminate information to school districts about the possibility of realizing efficiencies through either sharing food service directors or sharing food service operations. Such dissemination efforts could potentially be supported by CASBO, CAPSS, and the six RESCs.**

6. **The RESC Alliance should develop a centralized listing of all available opportunities for districts to obtain reduced rates for software licensing or hosting and each RESC should include links to this list on their websites to facilitate district access to such opportunities.**

Introduction

Regional Cooperation Between Boards of Education

Regional cooperation between boards of education refers to the joint, voluntary provision of services, programs, activities, or operations. Cooperative activities can vary widely, from two school districts arranging to share a bus route or a director of special education, to the creation of a regional school district serving children in grades K-12 or a group of districts jointly running an adult education program for interested adults from multiple towns.

Cooperative activities are often undertaken based on an assumption that the programs and services will be provided at a reduced cost compared to each school district individually providing the service or program, or at the very least, that the collaboration will contain future costs. It is important to note that in addition to any financial advantages, cooperative efforts may expand an individual school's course offerings or programs, or provide other non-economic benefits.

Historically, cooperation between boards of education was first authorized statutorily through a special act establishing the Regional High School District Number 1 of Litchfield County in 1937.[1] Then, in addition to developing a statutory scheme for the formation of additional regional school districts,[2] the legislature in 1949 authorized individual districts to share superintendents.[3] The 1960s saw the evolution of the statute authorizing shared superintendents and multi-district supervisory units into one allowing "cooperative arrangements" to carry out any of the statutory duties of boards of education (BOE).[4] As recently as 2010, the legislature further clarified that any board of education can partner with other boards of education or municipalities to establish shared service agreements with no formal requirements other than that such agreements be documented in writing.[5]

The Role of RESCs in Regional Cooperation

It is impossible to even discuss cooperative efforts of Connecticut's boards of education without first describing the role of Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs), as these entities play a significant role in facilitating cooperative efforts and make many shared services available. Almost every state has such educational services agencies (ESAs), which are generally defined as entities providing special education and other services to multiple school districts in a particular geographic area.[6] Connecticut's RESCs were specifically authorized and their powers and role first defined in 1972.[7] RESCs are "public education

[1] Special Act 37-428.
[2] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-39 *et seq.*
[3] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-158.
[4] C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a. The evolution and application of the "cooperative arrangement" statute is further addressed in Chapter 7.
[5] C.G.S. Sec. 10-239k.
[6] Office of Legislative Research. *Regional and Statewide Special Education Service Delivery in Selected States.* 2015-R-0013.
[7] C.G.S. Sec. 10-66a.

agencies" whose main purpose is to "furnish programs and services" to Connecticut's public school districts.[8]

In order to establish a RESC, a minimum of four local or regional boards of education within any of the 15 state planning regions designated by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) must apply. The interested boards of education must prepare a plan for the proposed RESC's organization and operation, and submit it to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) for review and approval. One RESC per each of the 15 OPM planning regions is allowed except in cases where there is a pupil population of 50,000 or more in a region, in which case a maximum of two RESCs would be permitted.[9]

There are currently six RESCs in Connecticut. Each RESC operates in a "catchment area," composed of 16 to 36 school districts. Appendix B contains both a map and a list of the school districts within each RESC region. The six RESCs and their central office locations are:

- Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) (North Haven);
- Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) (Hartford);
- Cooperative Education Services (C.E.S.) (Trumbull);
- EASTCONN (Hampton);
- EDUCATION CONNECTION (Litchfield); and
- LEARN (Old Lyme).

School districts choose whether to join the RESC serving their catchment area. Currently, all school districts have chosen to join their area's RESC. If a school district wishes to join a RESC outside its particular region, the district must obtain the approval of the majority of the outside RESC members at the time of application. A few districts belong to two RESCs, most often when the district is on the border of two RESC catchment areas.

Membership dues are charged to each participating district. For example, the CREC website notes that local school districts become members through an annual fee of 20 cents per pupil.[10] If a district had 5,000 students, the dues would be $1,000. Some of the services or programs of each RESC are available to its members at no charge, while other programs or services may require the payment of an additional fee. Such services may include consulting or technical assistance services, in-district professional development, or student programs and services. In general, districts report saving money through using such RESC based-services as compared to obtaining similar services from a private entity. Although many similar services are provided at all six RESCs, some individual programs and services are only offered at some RESCs. A school district (or group of school districts) may purchase a service or program unavailable at its home RESC from an out-of-region RESC without having to join that RESC.

In 1991, the six RESCs formed the Connecticut Alliance,[11] subsequently renamed the "RESC Alliance." The RESC Alliance works with a number of state agencies and programs

[8] C.G.S. Sec. 10-66a.
[9] C.G.S. Sec. 10-66a.
[10] See http://www.crec.org/about/index.php. Accessed on August 31, 2015.
[11] The document capturing the formation of the Connecticut RESC Alliance has been unofficially referred to as "the Windsor Accord."

including: the Departments of Children and Families, Correction, Education, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Developmental Services, Public Health, and Social Services.

Use of RESCs encouraged. The Connecticut State Department of Education encourages school districts to use the services provided by RESCs. For example, CSDE is authorized to favor grant applications that show use of RESC-provided services or joint purchasing agreements among districts for instructional or other supplies, testing materials, special education services, health care services, or food services.[12] In a 2013 CSDE report on small school districts, it was noted that RESCs could play a key role in growing regional cooperation, including developing a common school year calendar and looking for greater efficiencies for pupil transportation.[13]

Like school districts, RESCs are eligible to apply to CSDE for Interdistrict Cooperative Grants for establishing cooperative programs across school districts.[14] [15] Examples of programs funded by interdistrict cooperative grants include LEARN's *Reading Buddies*, EDUCATION CONNECTION's *LEGO League*, and ACES's *Math Does Count*.

Study Scope and Methodology

In April 2015, the PRI committee authorized this study of regional cooperation between local boards of education (Appendix A). The purpose of the study was to examine the prevalence, advantages, and disadvantages of cooperative efforts and identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding beneficial ones.

PRI staff organized data collection around six categories of school district activity, three instructional categories and three operational categories. The three instructional categories are: special education, general education, and professional development. The three operational categories are: transportation, administrative and back office functions, and cooperative purchasing.

In order to collect information about the prevalence of cooperative efforts involving school districts in each of the six categories, PRI staff conducted structured, 30-40 minute telephone interviews with a sample of school district superintendents. Additional information about the prevalence of cooperative efforts was obtained from many stakeholders, including: the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs), the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

Besides the structured school district superintendent interviews, PRI staff spoke with personnel in other local and regional school districts, at CSDE, and at Connecticut's RESCs. This information facilitated the description of specific ways in which cooperative efforts were conducted, the benefits or advantages to such efforts, and the identification of challenges or

[12] C.G.S. Sec.10-66o.
[13] Connecticut State Department of Education. *Report on the Study of Small School Districts Pursuant to Section 17 of Public Act 12-116*. October 15, 2013. Accessed on-line at http://eosweb/EOSWEB_Linked_Documents/PA12-116_s17_Oct_2013.pdf on August 31, 2015.
[14] C.G.S. Sec. 10-74d.
[15] Interdistrict programs are to promote educational opportunities for students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

barriers to cooperation between boards of education. Other key stakeholders interviewed included representatives of:

- American Federation of Teachers (AFT);
- Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG);
- Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE);
- Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS);
- Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO);
- Connecticut Association of Schools/Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CAS/CIAC);
- Connecticut Association of Small Towns (COST);
- Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Association (CCM/CIRMA);
- Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS);
- Connecticut Education Association (CEA);
- Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM);
- Connecticut Parent Teacher Association (CT PTA);
- Connecticut School Buildings and Grounds Association;
- Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA);
- Educational Resource Collaborative (ERC);
- Shared Services, LLC; and
- State Education Resource Center (SERC).

PRI staff also reviewed literature about cooperation involving Connecticut school districts in general and approaches to cooperation seen in other states. Finally, testimony was received at a PRI Committee public hearing on this study, held in Hartford on September 30, 2015.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations encountered during the course of this study. First, there is no standard definition of regional cooperation. Some believe there must be a contract or exchange of money in order to consider the effort to reflect regional cooperation. Variation among interviewed superintendents and other key stakeholders regarding inclusion of "in kind services," or services where a school district is paying the municipality for a portion of a town employee's salary, as examples of regional cooperation, make it challenging to collect this information.

Another limitation, particularly in connection with the superintendent structured interviews, was the relative length of time a superintendent had been in his or her current school district. Superintendents who had only recently begun working in a district often had a limited working knowledge of all of the district's instructional and operational cooperative efforts. Also, PRI staff found that superintendents of larger school districts were sometimes less familiar with the exact nature of all of the collaborative efforts in which the district participated than were superintendents of smaller school districts.

The willingness of school districts to share financial information and its availability was another study limitation, preventing the development of concrete estimates of potential cost savings from collaborative efforts. Many school districts and RESCs assume there are cost savings or other benefits from cooperative efforts, and do not track the actual results.

Report Organization

This report is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 describes the prevalence of regional cooperation. Chapter 2 identifies factors influencing formation of cooperative efforts. Chapter 3 provides a more specific discussion of some of the areas within the three instructional categories of special education, general education, professional development, and provides examples of cost savings and other benefits where available. Chapter 4 describes shared pupil transportation and Chapter 5 reviews shared administrative and back-office functions. Chapter 6 details cooperative purchasing. Finally, Chapter 7 addresses other forms of educational cooperation, especially those that involve students from different towns attending the same schools, including regional school districts, agri-science centers, designated high schools, and formal cooperative arrangements entered into pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a.

Agency Response

It is the policy of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee to provide agencies subject to a study with an opportunity to review and comment on the recommendations prior to publication of the final report. The affected agency, Connecticut Stated Department of Education, chose not to exercise that option.

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Chapter 1

Prevalence of Regional Cooperation

Introduction

The focus of this study was to examine the prevalence of regional cooperation between school districts, and the advantages and disadvantages of any such regional cooperation. Based on this information, the study was to identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding potentially beneficial examples of regional cooperation.

This chapter explains the research approach taken by PRI to capture in as quantitative way as possible the prevalence of regional cooperation. The results of the analysis are then presented, followed by further detail about the partnerships by type of cooperation category and area. Finally, the prevalence analysis is further described using certain school district characteristics.

Definition of cooperative efforts. For purposes of this study, "cooperative efforts" are defined as voluntary collaborations between:

- two or more school districts;
- between school districts and regional educational service centers (RESCs); or
- between school districts and other entities such as the State Education Resource Center (SERC), Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), New England Assistive Technology Marketplace (NEAT), out-of-state-educational service agencies (ESAs), and community colleges.

Cooperative efforts are included regardless of what form they take (e.g., whether there is a contract between parties or not, or whether the cooperation is an in-kind service). For example, a music teacher who splits time between two school districts and has separate contracts with each district, is included as representing a regional cooperative effort.

Agreements or efforts between school districts and local municipalities are not included in this definition of regional cooperation between school districts, but are described elsewhere in this report when relevant. Also not included in this analysis are:

- use of private providers or consultants by school districts, such as Kelly Services, YMCA, and Visiting Nurse Association (VNA);
- use of state bids, the Connecticut Partnership Plan (for health insurance), and government pricing;
- magnet schools and other school choice programs (to be examined in a separate PRI study); and
- collaborations between public and private schools, such as district-parochial school or district-private school.

Sources of information for analysis. Because there is no centralized collection point for information on regional cooperation between school districts, PRI staff developed a database of such information. A key source of this information was detailed structured telephone interviews with a sample of school district superintendents (and/or sometimes other school personnel, such as a business manager) at districts serving grades K-12 (and which are not regional school districts). There are 122 such school districts in Connecticut, each with a superintendent. Due to resource limitations, PRI staff could not get to all these superintendents. Instead, 56 representative districts (46 percent) were selected for these interviews using a stratified random sample procedure based on school district enrollment size.

Appendix C describes the selection process and representativeness of the resulting sample in terms of enrollment size, regional educational service center (RESC) catchment area, and district reference group (DRG).[16] The 56 randomly selected school districts are found to be fairly representative of all 122 school districts. Appendix D provides a copy of the questions asked during the structured telephone interviews with superintendents.

Beyond superintendent interviews, additional information from the following sources is included in this assessment of the prevalence of regional cooperation between school districts:

- all six RESCs (e.g., information on school districts participating in RESC-led regional cooperative efforts);
- the Connecticut Association of Schools/Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CAS/CIAC) (e.g., co-operative sports teams);
- the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) (e.g., Interdistrict Cooperative Grants, Adult Education, enrollment);
- Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) data;
- New England Assistive Technology Marketplace (NEAT) website (membership school districts); and
- Census data (e.g., Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List per Capita (AENGLC)).

Categories of regional cooperation. There are six potential categories where regional cooperation between school districts may occur. These are the three instructional categories of special education, general education, and professional development; and the three operational categories of student transportation, administrative/back office functions, and cooperative purchasing. The study also examined the choice of partners in cooperative efforts: school district-school district(s); school district-RESC; and school district-other entity.

As noted, while regional cooperation between school districts and local municipalities was not a focus of this study, PRI staff learned that it is quite prevalent in the operational categories, particularly for administrative/back office functions and cooperative purchasing. As a result, the analysis in this chapter focuses almost exclusively on instructional cooperative efforts

[16] District Reference Groups (DRGs) is a classification system in which districts that have public school students with similar socioeconomic status (SES) and need are grouped together.

and more information about the non-instructional categories can be found in later chapters. Subsequent chapters also more specifically discuss the kinds of cooperative efforts that exist around the state—instructional and non-instructional, and provide examples of cost savings and other benefits where available.

Relationship to certain district characteristics. In the literature and through key stakeholder interviews, school district size has been considered a possible characteristic related to regional cooperation. To assess this possibility, school districts were divided into three categories depending on their student enrollment on October 1, 2013: smaller school districts (less than 2,000 students); medium sized school districts (2,000-7,999 students); and larger school districts (8,000+ students), and assessed for differences in prevalence of regional cooperation.[17]

Another characteristic considered possibly related to regional cooperation is geographic area of the state, with school districts in the more rural areas of eastern and western Connecticut, for example, being expected to collaborate. The RESC catchment areas are directly related to geographic areas and are also considered to play a major role in promoting regional cooperation.

Lastly, economic measures, such as district resource group (DRG) and Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List per Capita (AENGLC), were also examined as possible characteristics related to regional cooperation.

Factors associated with regional cooperation. Superintendents were asked what factors go into deciding whether to form a cooperative effort. Eight factors were identified by the superintendents:

- Contains costs or saves money?
- Creates efficiencies or improves quality of services?
- Satisfies a need of the school district?
- Benefits all collaborating parties?
- Benefits/positively impacts students?
- Logistics can be worked out?
- Needs of local control/politics/relationships are met?
- School district has knowledge of opportunity?

Examples of the presence (advantage) or absence (disadvantage/barrier) of the factors and outcomes related to regional cooperation are described in Chapter 2.

Prevalence of Regional Cooperation Among Local School Districts

Based on superintendent interviews and other sources of information, PRI staff attempted to quantify prevalence of regional cooperation for the 56 school districts in the study sample. Nearly 90 areas of possible cooperative efforts were queried across the three instructional and

[17] The current three school district size categories are better suited to the quantitative analyses described in this chapter. Other report chapters that focus on operational categories refer to the original six school district size groups.

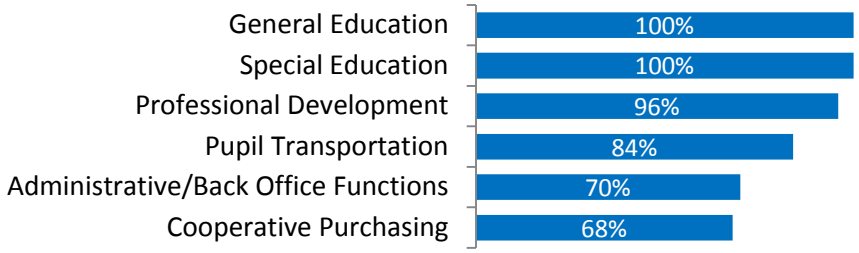
three operational categories, as shown in the PRI Superintendent Interview Guide (Appendix D). The intent was to capture as many cooperative areas as possible, and PRI staff measured presence or absence of effort in these areas—no assessment was made of extensiveness or impact the effort might have on the districts. There were 14 possible areas of collaboration within the special education category, for example, including programs providing clinical day treatment, summer school, or transitional services for older high school students, to therapy services such as physical, occupational, and speech and language therapy. In comparison, there were 29 possible areas of collaboration within the administrative/back office functions category including sharing of administrative staff such as a business manager or IT director, human resources fingerprinting/background checks, and facilities and grounds shared personnel or equipment. Sharing a business manager, for example, is counted the same as sharing facilities and grounds equipment. A school district was considered to cooperate in a particular area if there was at least one cooperative activity occurring.

As an overall measure of prevalence of regional cooperation, PRI staff added together the number of areas where at least one cooperative effort occurred and found a total ranging from 7 areas per school district to 52 areas per school district. The median or middle-most number of areas was 20 per school district where at least some cooperation was occurring.

Almost all school districts studied have at least one cooperative effort in the instructional categories of general education, special education, and professional development (Figure 1-1).

At least two-thirds of the school districts participate in at least one cooperative effort in the operational categories of pupil transportation, administrative/back office functions, and cooperative purchasing.

Figure 1-1. Percent of Sample School Districts with at Least One Regional Cooperative Effort in the Category



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

The most common areas of cooperative efforts within general education are for:

- **adult education (93 percent)**: a range of classes for adults, from general education diploma (GED), English as a second language (ESL), and citizenship classes, to recreational offerings such as tennis and knitting.

- **interdistrict cooperative grants (91 percent):** purpose of the grants is to bring students together from across the state to improve academic performance and reduce racial, ethnic, and socio-economic isolation.

The most common areas of cooperative efforts within special education are: **separate classrooms or programs (98 percent) for students with autism, mental health or other needs**.

*The m**ost common area** of cooperative effort within professional development is:* training for teachers, and other professional staff (93 percent)**: includes workshops, conferences, and continuing education.**

Table 1-1 shows the most common areas of collaboration in all categories, including the relatively less prevalent operational areas of pupil transportation, administrative/back office functions, and cooperative purchasing.

Table 1-1. Most Common Areas of Collaboration by Category

Instructional Categories	Areas
General Education	• Adult Education (93%) • Interdistrict Cooperative Grant programs (IDCG) (91%) • Early Childhood (82%) • Shared Athletics or Other Extra-Curricular Activities (64%) • Summer School (61%) • Program for suspended or expelled students (45%)
Special Education	• Separate classrooms (98%) • Clinical Day or Extended Day Treatment Programs (70%) • Assistive Technology (59%) • Summer/Extended School Year Programs for Special Education Students (57%) • Transitional programs (55%) • Services for Deaf or Hearing Impaired (50%) • Behavioral services/Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBAs) (46%)
Professional Development	• Training for Teachers, Professional Staff (93%) • Training for Paraprofessionals, Non-Certified Staff (64%) • Curriculum Development (54%)
Operational Categories	**Areas**
Pupil Transportation	• Special Education Transportation (71%)
Administrative/Back Office Functions	• Fingerprinting/Background checks (34%) • Recruitment/Hiring (23%)
Cooperative Purchasing	• Educational and/or School Supplies (39%) • Office Supplies (37%) • Heating Oil/Gas (27%) • Furniture, Fixture, and Equipment (25%)

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

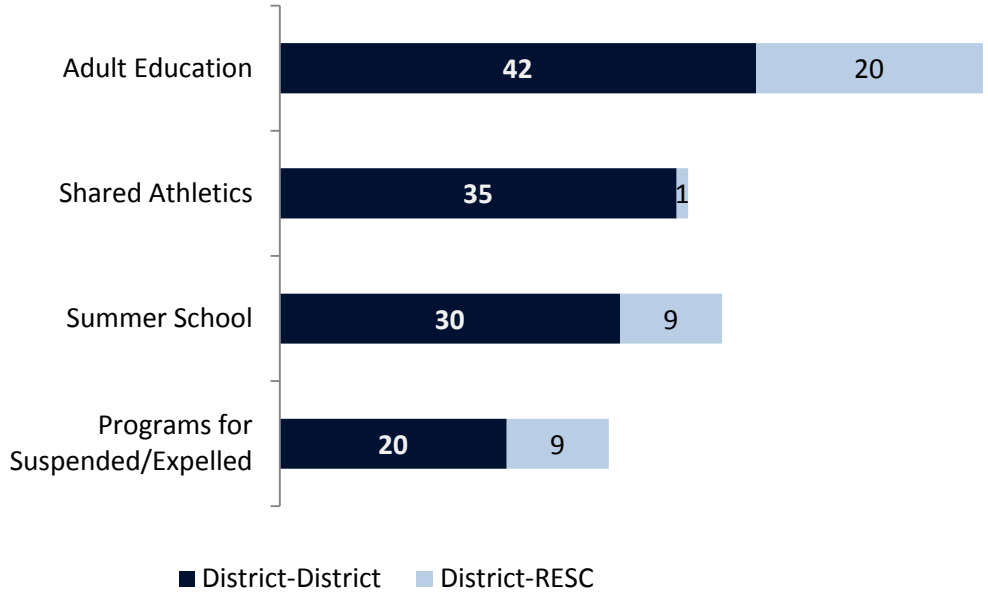
Less common areas of instructional cooperation in special education include: physical, occupational, and speech and language therapies (29 percent, 32 percent and 25 percent, respectively). Some of the less frequent areas of general education collaboratives include: distance/on-line learning, English Language Learner (ELL), and gifted/talented programs (39 percent, 34 percent, and 7 percent, respectively).

Choice of Partners for Regional Cooperative Efforts

Another element of regional cooperation is a school district's choice of partners. A school district could partner with other school districts, with a RESC, or with both school districts and RESCs. *There are several areas in general education where school districts are more likely to collaborate with other school districts than with a RESC* (Figure 1-2):

- adult education;
- shared athletics;
- summer school; and
- programs for suspended/expelled students.

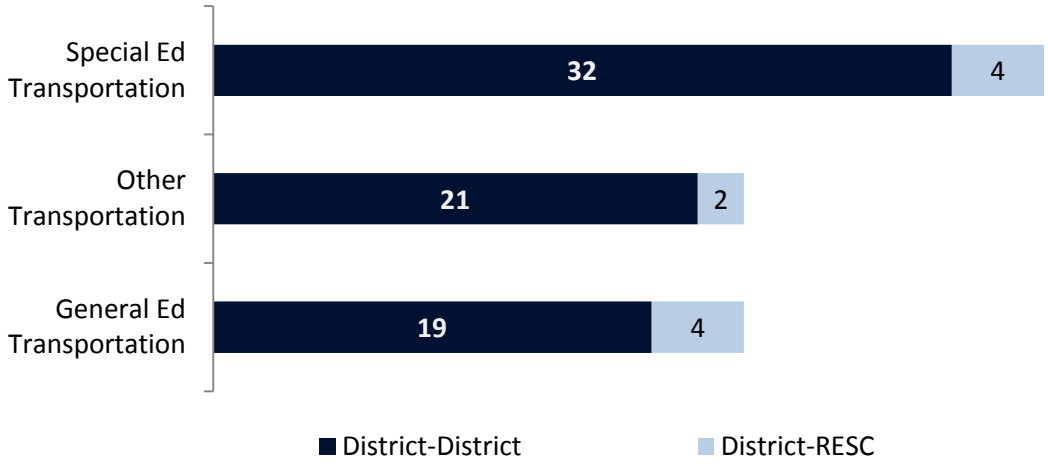
Figure 1-2. Cooperative Efforts in General Education that are More Likely to be District-District



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Pupil transportation is another area where school districts are more likely to collaborate with other school districts than with a RESC (Figure 1-3).

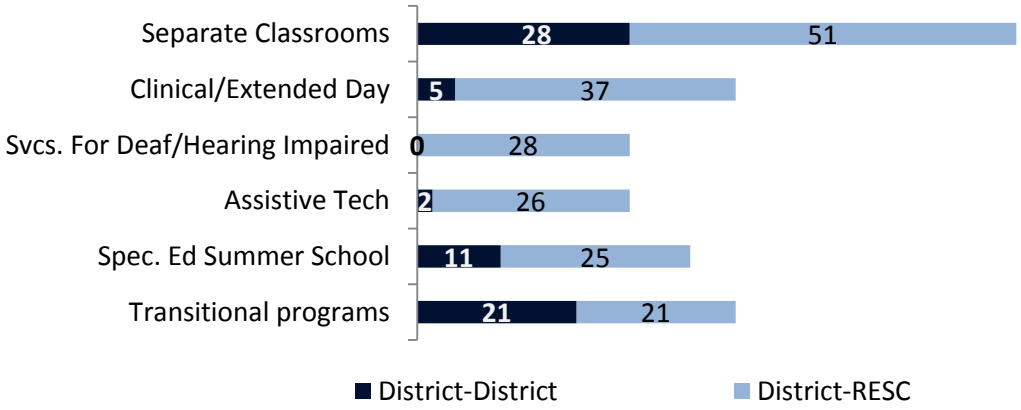
Figure 1-3. Cooperative Efforts in Transportation are More Likely to be District-District



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Many of the collaborations in special education areas involve a RESC. For example, **with the exception of transitional programs, the most frequently occurring collaborations in special education are partnerships with a RESC rather than other school districts** (Figure 1-4):

Figure 1-4. Cooperative Efforts in Special Education are More Likely to be District-RESC



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Collaborations within general education early childhood programs, and distance/on-line learning programs, are also more likely to be between school districts and RESCs. Professional development areas are also more likely to be between school districts and RESCs. Lastly, in the cooperative purchasing of educational/school supplies, and office supplies, school districts are more likely to partner with a RESC than another school district.

Cooperative Efforts With Municipalities

Cooperative purchasing. *In the cooperative purchasing category, school districts are more likely to partner with the local municipality than with other school districts or RESCs in the following areas* (Table 1-2):

Table 1-2. Areas in Cooperative Purchasing More Prevalent Between District-Municipality

	Total District-District/RESC/Other Entity Cooperation (N= 56)	District-Municipality Cooperation (N= 56)
Heating oil/gas	15 (27%)	36 (64%)
Other utilities	6 (11%)	29 (52%)
Health Insurance	7 (12%)	31 (55%)
Premises Liability Insurance	7 (12%)	36 (64%)
Other Insurance	6 (11%)	33 (59%)
Waste Management Services	1 (2%)	29 (52%)
Security Services	0 (0%)	28 (50%)

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Administrative/back office functions. *There are many administrative/back office functions where school districts are more likely to partner with the local municipality than with other school districts or RESCs* (Table 1-3). With the exception of food services, administrative/back office functions are more likely to be shared with the school district and local municipality than with other school districts, RESCs or other entities.

Table 1-3. Collaborations in Administrative/Back Office Function Areas

	Total District-District/RESC/Other Entity cooperation (N= 56)	District-Municipality Cooperation (N= 56)
Facilities and grounds	11 (20%)	54 (96%)
Financial services	1 (2%)	42 (75%)
Human resources	27 (48%)	36 (64%)
Information technology	15 (27%)	32 (57%)
Shared administrative staff	14 (25%)	25 (45%)
Food service	7 (12%)	1 (2%)

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Prevalence Related to School District Characteristics

The study examined several characteristics in regard to frequency of cooperative efforts: school district size; geographic location; and economic measures. This section describes the findings for each of the potential characteristics.

School district size. As noted earlier, to quantify the regional cooperation occurring within each district, the nearly 90 areas of possible cooperative efforts asked about across all six categories were summed and a total number of cooperative areas determined. Table 1-4 shows the percent of school districts that fall below or at/above the median for the three school district sizes.

Smaller school districts cooperate in relatively more areas than larger school districts. **While some tend to think of collaboration occurring primarily in the smaller school districts, there are many cooperative efforts occurring in middle sized school districts.**

Table 1-4. Percent of School Districts At/Above or Below Median Number of Cooperatives Areas

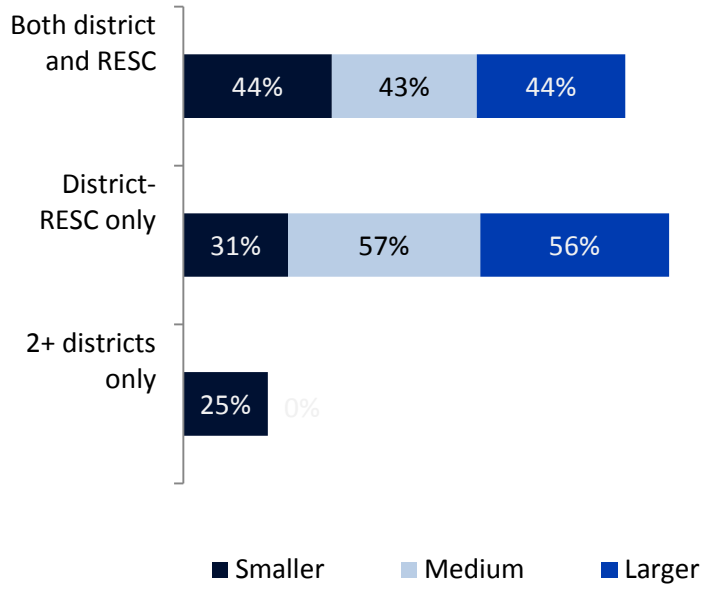
School District Size	Total Number of Cooperative Areas	
	% Under Median	% At/Above Median
Smaller	41%	59%
Medium	37%	63%
Larger	89%	11%

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Partners. In general, school district size is not associated with choice of partner for regional collaboration (i.e., other school districts, RESCs, or other entity) with the following exceptions:

*Separate classrooms***.** For the smaller districts, one-quarter of their collaborations are with other school districts only, whereas none of the medium and large districts turn only to other school districts when collaborating in this special education area (Figure 1-5).

Figure 1-5. Collaborative Partners for Separate Classrooms or Programs in Special Education

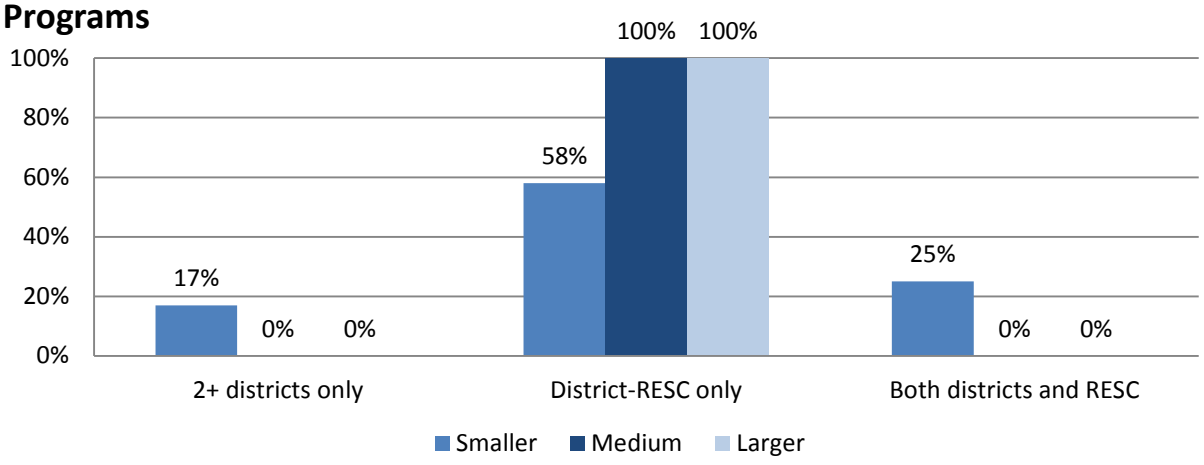


Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Clinical day or extended day treatment programs. While the smaller school districts are more likely to partner with other school districts than are the medium and larger size districts, RESCs are overwhelmingly the partner of choice when it comes to this area of special education program or service (Figure 1-6).

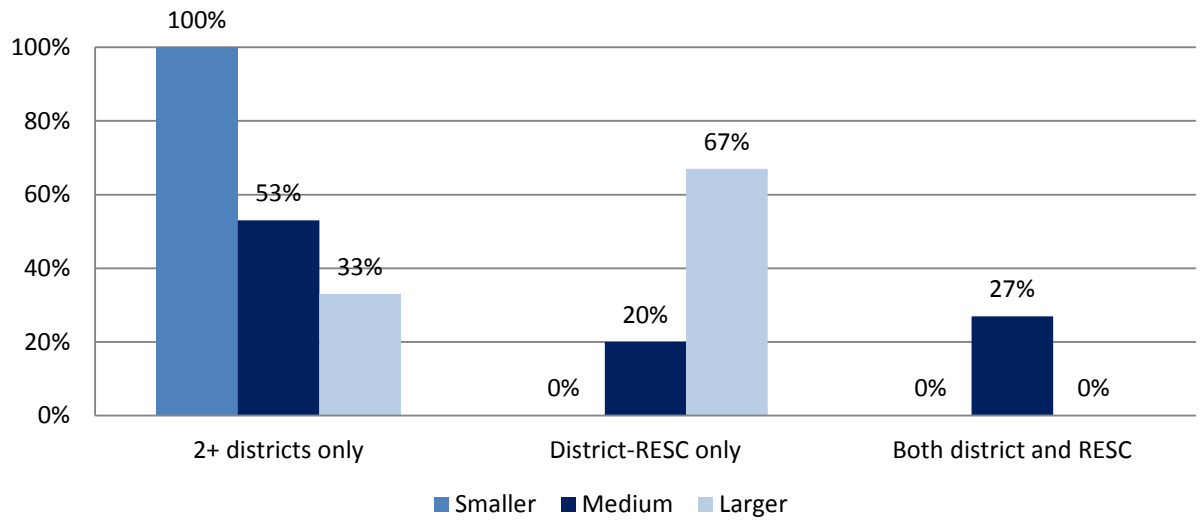
Programs for suspended or expelled students. Figure 1-7 shows all the smaller school districts in collaborations for programs for suspended or expelled students are partnering with other school districts only, whereas two-thirds of larger school districts partner with a RESC.

Figure 1-6. Collaborative Partners for Clinical/Extended Day Programs



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

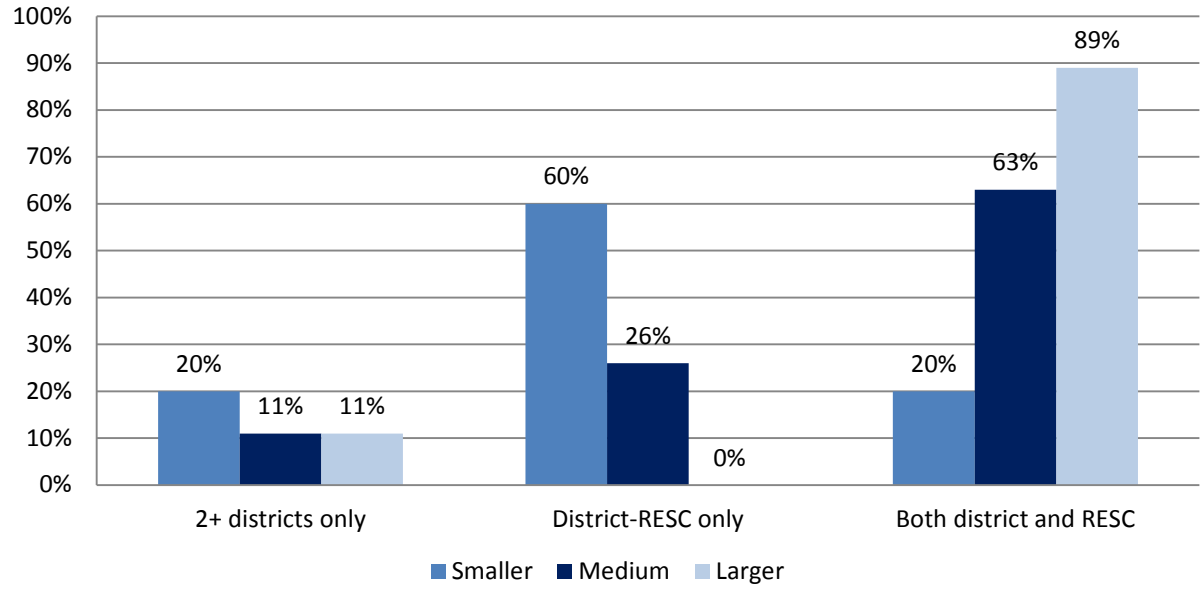
Figure 1-7. Collaborative Programs for Suspended or Expelled Students



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Interdistrict cooperative grant programs (IDCG). Figure 1-8 shows 60 percent of smaller school districts partner solely with a RESC for their IDCG Grant programs, while 89 percent of the larger schools partner with a combination of RESCs and other school districts.

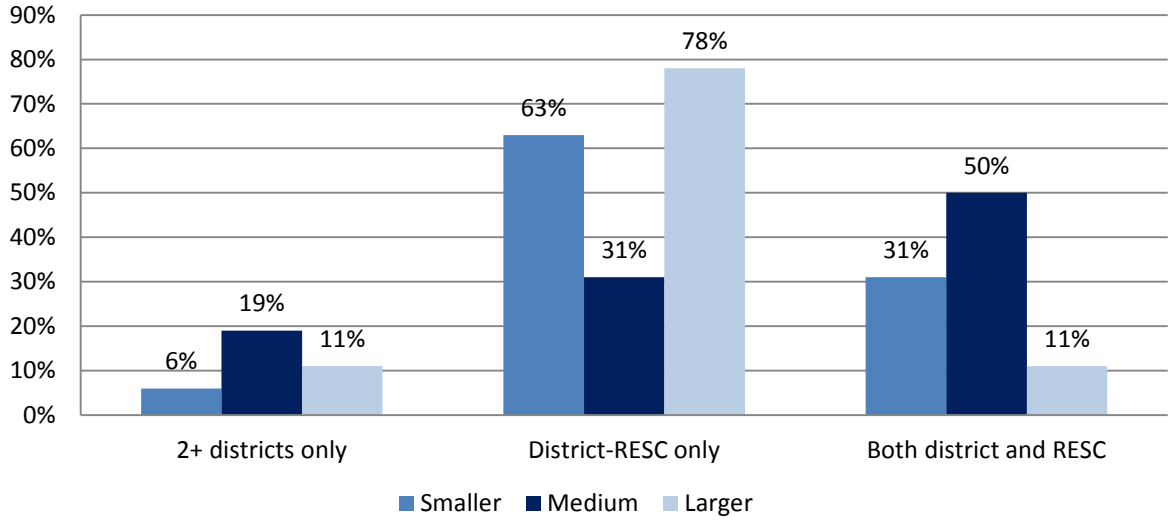
Figure 1-8. Collaborative Programs for IDCG Grants



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Training for teachers and other professional staff. The size of the school district is associated with what partner they cooperate with (Figure 1-9). Three-quarters of the larger school districts and two-thirds of the smaller school districts partner with a RESC for their collaborations in training for teachers and other professional staff. The medium size school districts are more likely to collaborate with other school districts at least some of the time.

Figure 1-9. Collaborative Partners for Training for Teachers and Other Professional Staff



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

School District Geographic Area

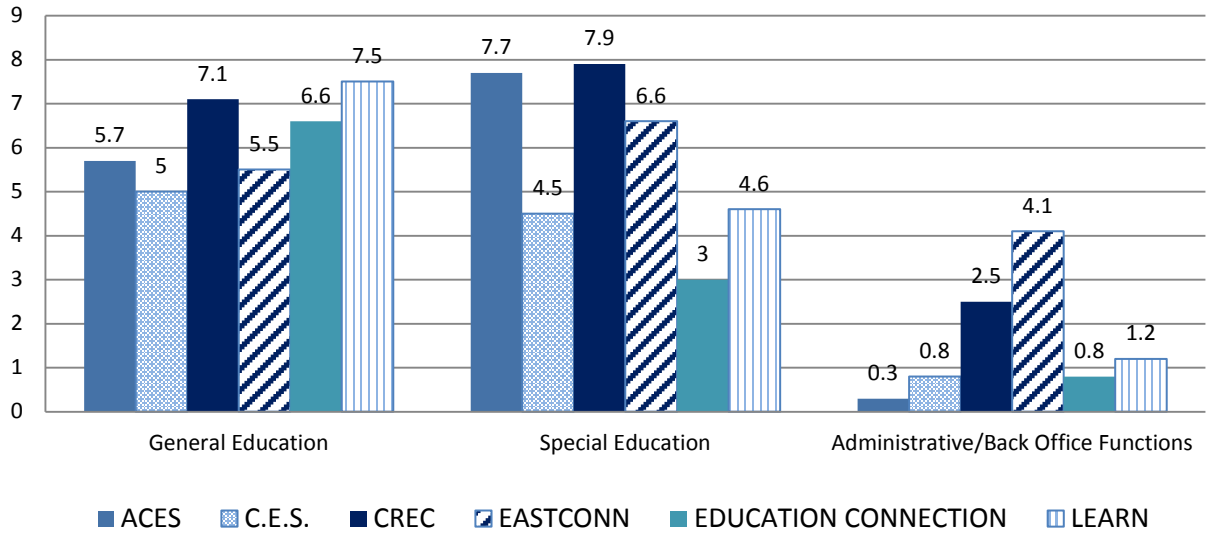
The six RESC catchment areas correspond to geographic parts of Connecticut: ACES serves the southcentral part of the state; C.E.S. serves the southwest part of the state; CREC serves the northcentral part of the state; EASTCONN serves the northeast region of the state; EDUCATION CONNECTION serves the northwest part of the state; and LEARN serves the southeastern part of the state. Each RESC is tailored to the needs of the school districts in its catchment area (see map in Appendix B).

Frequency of cooperative efforts. In three of the six categories examined for this study, more or fewer types of cooperative efforts occurred depending on the RESC catchment area (Figure 1-10):

- Southeast/LEARN and northcentral/CREC school districts collaborate in more general education areas than do school districts in the Southwest/C.E.S. catchment area.
- Northcentral/CREC and southcentral/ACES school districts collaborate in more special education areas than do school districts in the Northwest/EDUCATION CONNECTION catchment area.

- Northeast/EASTCONN school districts collaborate on more administrative/back office functions than do school districts in the Southcentral/ACES catchment area.

Figure 1-10. Average Number of Areas in General Education, Special Education, and Administrative/Back Office Functions for RESC Catchment Areas



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Cooperation in special education. As shown in Table 1-5, collaborations for:

- Clinical day/extended day treatment are especially likely to occur in the C.E.S., CREC, and EASTCONN catchment areas.
- Physical therapy and occupational therapy are especially likely to occur in the ACES catchment area.
- Behavioral services/BCBAs are especially likely to occur in the LEARN and ACES catchment areas.
- Psychological services is especially likely to occur in the CREC and EASTCONN catchment areas.
- Services for deaf or hearing impaired, and summer/extended school year programs for special education, are especially likely to occur in the C.E.S. and CREC catchment areas.
- Assistive technology is especially likely to occur in the ACES, CREC, and EASTCONN catchment areas.

Table 1-5. Percent of School Districts in RESC Catchment Area Collaborating on Certain Special Education Services

	ACES	C.E.S.	CREC	EASTCONN	EDUCATION CONNECTION	LEARN
Clinical Day/ Extended Day Treatment	44%	88%	80%	91%	20%	62%
Physical Therapy	67%	0%	27%	46%	0%	12%
Occupational Therapy	67%	0%	27%	54%	0%	25%
Behavioral Services /BCBAs	67%	12%	47%	46%	0%	88%
Psychological Services	44%	0%	60%	64%	0%	0%
Services for Deaf or Hearing Impaired	56%	62%	100%	9%	0%	25%
Summer/Extended School Year Programs for Special Education	56%	88%	87%	27%	40%	25%
Assistive Technology	100%	50%	67%	64%	40%	12%

Note: Collaboration could be with other school districts, RESCs, or other entities.

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Partners in special education cooperative efforts. Regional cooperation between school districts and other school districts, RESCs, or other entities varies by RESC catchment area and special education area of cooperation. Table 1-6 shows the percent of school districts in each RESC catchment area that collaborate with a RESC on at least one special education area. The RESC could be the one located in their catchment area, one located in another catchment area, or multiple RESCs across multiple catchment areas. Cross-over or use of multiple RESCs occurs when a particular RESC has a program or service that is not offered in the home RESC, or there is a history and comfort in working with another RESC, and the collaboration continues when the superintendent moves to another school district in a different catchment area. RESCs also charge different amounts for the same program or service, and some superintendents will use the program and services of the RESC that is least expensive.

RESCs play a larger role in certain special education areas, depending on the geographic area. For example:

- Over three-quarters of the school districts located in the C.E.S., CREC, and EASTCONN catchment areas partner with a RESC for clinical day/extended day treatment programs.

- Two-thirds of the school districts located in the ACES catchment area partner with a RESC for physical therapy services, occupational therapy services, and behavioral services/BCBAs.
  - Many of the school districts in the LEARN catchment area also partner with a RESC for behavioral services/BCBAs.
- Over half of the school districts located in the CREC and EASTCONN catchment areas partner with a RESC for psychological services.
- Over half of the school districts located in the ACES, C.E.S. and CREC catchment areas partner with a RESC for services for deaf or hearing impaired students.
- Over 80 percent of the school districts in the C.E.S. and CREC catchment areas partner with a RESC for summer/extended school year programs for special education.
- All the school districts located in the ACES catchment area, and at least half in the C.E.S. and EASTCONN catchment areas, partner with a RESC for at least one assistive technology service.

Table 1-6. Percent of School Districts in RESC Catchment Area Collaborating with a RESC on Certain Special Education Services

	ACES n[1]=9	C.E.S. n=8	CREC n=15	EASTCONN n=11	EDUCATION CONNECTION n=5	LEARN n=8
Clinical Day/Extended Day Treatment	44%	88%	80%	82%	20%	50%
Physical Therapy	67%	0%	13%	27%	0%	12%
Occupational Therapy	67%	0%	7%	27%	0%	25%
Behavioral Services /BCBAs	67%	12%	27%	36%	0%	88%
Psychological Services	44%	0%	60%	64%	0%	0%
Services for Deaf or Hearing Impaired	56%	62%	100%	9%	0%	25%
Summer/Extended School Year Programs for Special Education	33%	88%	87%	9%	0%	12%
Assistive Technology	100%	50%	33%	64%	20%	0%

[1]n=number of school districts in the sample that were located in the RESC catchment area.

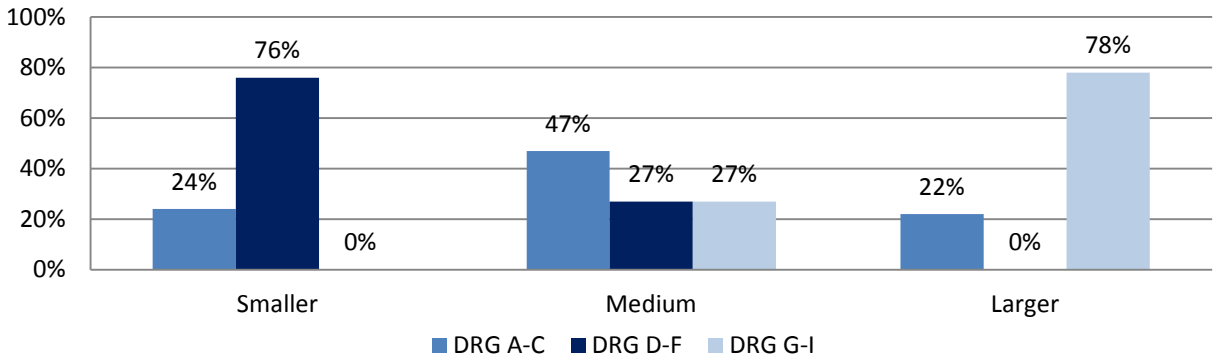
Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Economic Measures Related to School District

District reference groups, or DRGs, form a classification system whereby districts that have public school students with similar socioeconomic status and need are grouped together. Indicators that are examined in determining DRG include parent education level, family structure, parent occupation, poverty, and home language spoken. There are nine DRGs in Connecticut, labelled from A to I, with DRG A representing districts with the highest socioeconomic status and lowest student need. Conversely, DRG I contains districts having the lowest socioeconomic status and highest student need.

DRG and school district size. Three-quarters of the larger districts are in the DRG G-I category, and three-quarters of smaller districts are in the DRG D-F category (Figure 1-11).

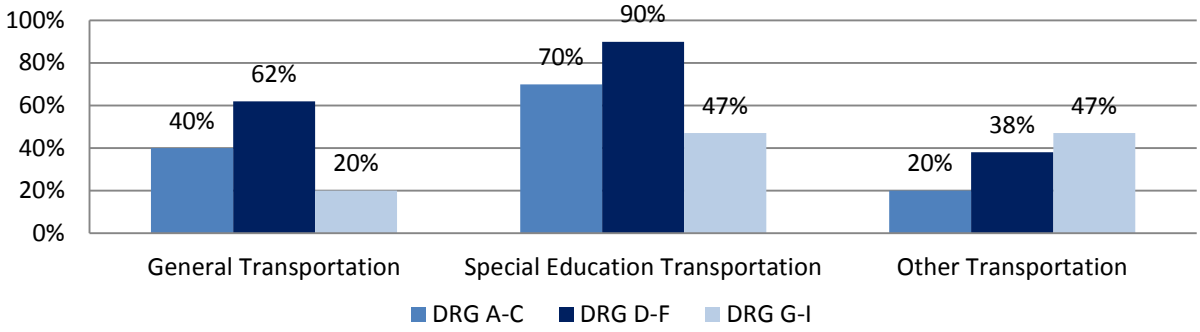
Figure 1-11. DRG and School Size



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

DRG and areas of regional cooperation. Collaborations occur in more areas of special education among school districts in DRGs G-I (average of 7.5 areas) than among school districts in DRGs A-C (average of 5.0 areas). Collaborations occur in more areas of transportation among school districts in DRGs D-F (average of 2.5) than among school districts in DRGs G-I (average of 1.1). For example, the school districts located in DRG D-F are most likely, and the school districts located in DRG G-I least likely, to collaborate on general transportation and special education transportation (Figure 1-12).

Figure 1-12. Collaboration on Transportation for DRGs



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

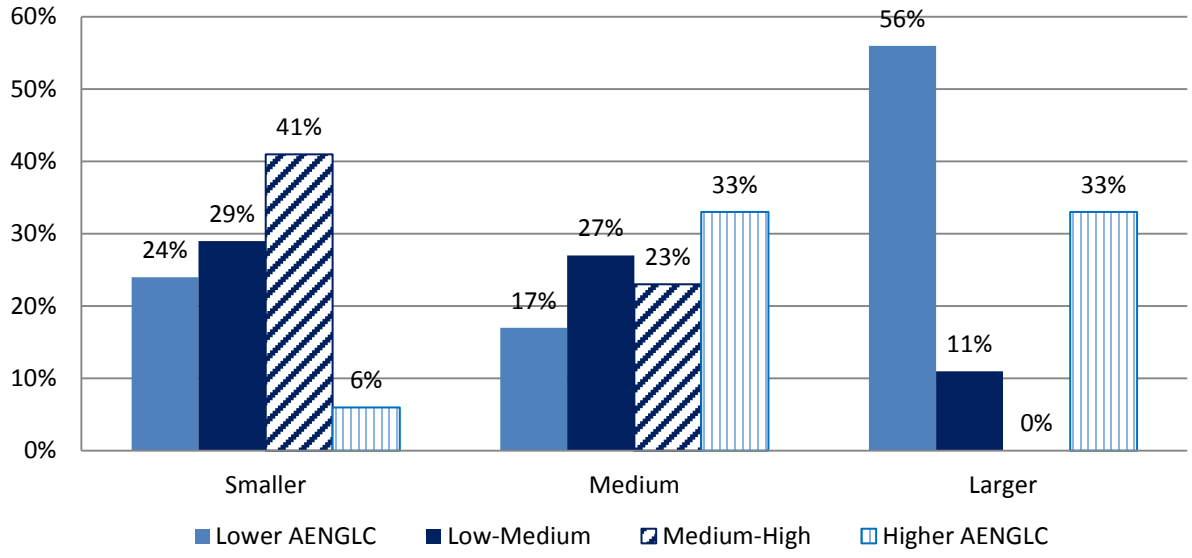
The more affluent DRGs (A-C) are not as likely to form collaboratives as are the less affluent districts in the following three special education areas:

- There are fewer collaboratives in the area of physical therapy for DRGs A-C than there are for DRGs D-F and DRGs G-I (10 percent vs. 38 percent and 40 percent, respectively).
- There are fewer collaboratives in the area of occupational therapy for DRGs A-C than there are for DRGs D-F and DRGs G-I (10 percent vs. 43 percent and 47 percent, respectively).
- There are fewer collaboratives in the area of psychological services for DRGs A-C than there are for DRGs D-F and DRGs G-I (5 percent vs. 43 percent and 67 percent, respectively).

Collaborations for summer or extended school year programs for special education students was a fourth area where there are differences between DRG groups. In this area, though, school districts in DRGs A-C and DRGs G-I are more likely to collaborate than are school districts in DRGs D-F (73 percent, 65 percent, and 38 percent, respectively).

AENGLC. Another measure related to socioeconomic status is the Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List, or AENGLC. Dividing the school district municipalities into quartiles, Figure 1-13 shows, while over half the larger school districts are in the lowest AENGLC category, unlike the DRG analysis, there is not a clear pattern for school size and the remaining AENGLC categories.

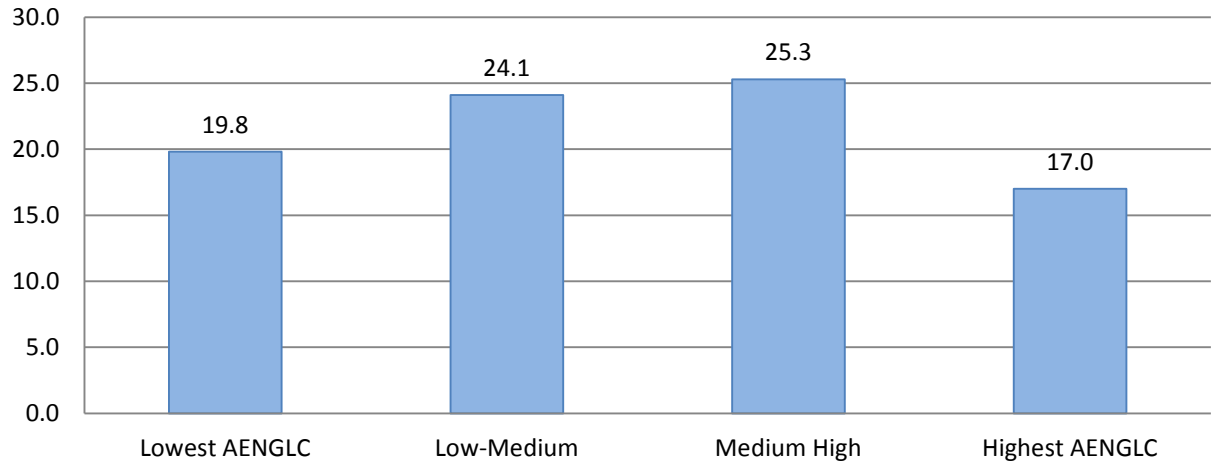
Figure 1-13. AENGLC and School Size



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

Overall, school districts in the middle two groups have more areas of collaboration than school districts in either the highest or lowest AENGLC groups. (Figure 1-14).

Figure 1-14. AENGLC and Number of Areas of Regional Collaboration



Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews and other sources.

There are differences by AENGLC in the area of special education. Overall, school districts in the lower two AENGLC groups have collaborations in more areas of special education (averages of 7.3 and 7.6, respectively) than groups in the higher two AENGLC groups (5.6 and 4.5, respectively).

The most affluent AENGLC group is not as likely as the three other AENGLC groups to form collaborations in the following special education areas:

- There are no collaboratives in the area of physical therapy for the highest AENGLC group compared to the other three groups (36 percent, 50 percent, and 29 percent for lowest, low/medium, and medium/high AENGLC groups, respectively).
- There are no collaboratives in the area of occupational therapy for the highest AENGLC group compared to the other three groups (43 percent, 50 percent, and 36 percent for lowest, low/medium, and medium/high AENGLC groups, respectively).
- There are no collaboratives in the area of psychological services for the highest AENGLC group compared to the other three groups (71 percent, 43 percent, and 29 percent for lowest, low/medium, and medium/high AENGLC groups, respectively).

Chapter 2

Factors Influencing Formation of Cooperative Efforts

Introduction

This chapter discusses eight factors superintendents identified when PRI staff asked them what goes into deciding whether to form a regional cooperative effort. As described, depending on the assessment of the situation, each of the factors discussed can be an advantage or barrier to regional cooperation.

Factors Identified by School District Superintendents

One of the questions PRI staff asked superintendents as part of the structured telephone interview was to identify what factors went into deciding whether to form a regional cooperative effort. There were eight factors identified by the superintendents (Table 2-1). For example, over half the superintendents interviewed (59 percent), said whether the cooperative effort saved money or contained costs was a key factor in their decisionmaking. Examples of the presence (advantage) or absence (disadvantage/barrier) of the factor and outcomes related to regional cooperation are discussed in this section.

Factor 1: Contains costs or saves money?

Advantages. Cooperative efforts that contain costs or save money are seen as a key advantage to regional cooperation. Money that does not have to be spent in one area of the school district budget can be reallocated to another area in need of funds.

Containing costs or saving money by joining together with partners, particularly in the category of special education, can also make budgeting for special education more predictable. Some shared models for special education programs address the volatility of special education costs that are due to the particular needs of individual students from year to year. The Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center (FVDC) and the Southern Transition Real-World and Independent Vocational Education (STRIVE) programs described in Chapter 3 are two examples of shared models that make the costs of some special education programs more predictable.

Barriers/disadvantages. Several superintendents commented on school districts exploring ideas for regional collaborations, but being deterred from proceeding further due to lack of funds to cover start-up costs. One superintendent noted that regional cooperatives in special education programs, for example, will lose money in the first few years until the program is fully established, due to the need to repurpose classrooms or unused school buildings.

Initial expenses to form a potentially cost saving/cost containing cooperative system or service can be prohibitive for school districts. Several key stakeholders suggested the state make seed money available to start up cooperative programs that have not been implemented before at the regional level. An alternative to a grant to cover start-up costs would be a loan that would be repaid out of any cost savings that were achieved through the cooperative effort.

Table 2-1. Factors Contributing to the Formation of Regional Cooperative Efforts

Factor	Percent Identifying	Related Superintendent Comments
1. Contains costs/saves money	59%	• Has to be worth it, must cost less, not more (unless significant value for kids) • Not so much decreasing costs as cost containment • In general, the economic savings has to be significantly more than 5% to entice collaborations. A 20-30% savings might promote or encourage regionalism
2. Creates efficiencies or improves quality of services	36%	• Does it create efficiencies for all parties? • Will it help us to operate more efficiently? • There needs to be both a savings and an efficiency (Something that would save $2,000 but require 400 hours to do, is not worth it)
3. Satisfies a need of the school district	21%	• Does it make sense? (gain in efficiency and cost savings, that can then lead to the reallocation of resources for other district needs) • There needs to be a common need among the potential partners • There has to be both a need and opportunity to collaborate
4. Benefits all collaborating parties	21%	• Is there mutual (and relatively equal) benefit? • Meets the needs of both school districts (both parties); creates a win-win situation • At least the same or greater level of services can be offered at lower cost and without inconvenience or increased risk
5. Benefits/positively impacts students	18%	• Is it good for kids? • If it doesn't create excellence/excellent program, then they don't want their students involved in something that isn't high quality • If there are not enough kids to field a team, should combine with other school districts to make the sport available (co-op sports)
6. Logistics can be worked out	18%	• Coordinating school day schedule and calendar • Logistics—will it work in light of time frames, schedules, etc. • Logistics—who oversees what?
7. Needs of local control/politics/ relationships are met	18%	• Is there a mutual willingness on the part of the potential partners? • No loss of control, impact on the community • Is there BOE support and town council support?
8. School district has knowledge of opportunity	11%	• Is there availability to cooperate in the school district's geographic area? • Availability and knowledge of opportunity • Proximity to a larger better resourced district that may have developed services and have capacity to share

Source: Based on PRI superintendent interviews.

The difficulty in coming up with the start-up funds for such programs is also mentioned in a recent legislatively mandated CSDE study of small school districts, which concluded that the state could do more to encourage collaboration across the smallest districts through competitive grants and other state supports and resource offerings.[18]

Another barrier to regional cooperation occurs when the cooperative effort does not, or is not anticipated to contain or save money, such as cooperative sports teams. While it may save money for individual school districts already involved in a particular sport that is experiencing a shrinking team size (such as having a single coach as opposed to paying two coaches, and footing the entire bill for transportation to games as opposed to splitting the cost with one or more other school districts), these are also additional expenses for school districts thinking about forming new cooperative sports teams. For example, according to CAS/CIAC, it can cost $3,000 to line a football or soccer field, and officials' fees can cost $3,000-$40,000 per team.

Sometimes a cooperative effort is anticipated to save school districts money, but experience finds that not to be the case. Examples of discontinuation due to lack of realization of cost savings were mentioned a number of times by school superintendents interviewed:

- A school district was looking into forming a regional cooperative program, but found it more cost-effective to hire a part-time retired teacher and provide the service in-district rather than paying for out-of-district transportation.
- Other school districts have looked into joining health insurance collaboratives, but have determined that their rates would either increase or remain the same, and so these districts opted not to participate in the collaborative.
- Another superintendent commented that administrators and staff in smaller districts tend to perform many functions, and so the sharing of discrete back office functions may not lead to a reduction in personnel because they are still needed to perform other functions. Without reducing personnel, a significant source of cost-savings is eliminated.

While some superintendents believed there were cost-savings by partnering with a RESC, others expressed concern about the prices charged by some RESCs. Examples of areas where this concern was expressed included special education programs and services such as occupational or physical therapists, and separate programs for particular populations. Sometimes a school district had more savings by doing its own subcontracting rather than relying on a RESC. For example, one school district had used a RESC for PT and OT, but found it to be too expensive. That district now does its own subcontracting for these services at a reduced rate.

Because RESCs must generate most of their funding, they are entrepreneurial and must build administrative costs into fees charged to school districts. The cost for certain programs or services is weighed against the cost to the school district (or some other consortium outside a RESC) providing the service, and may result in the termination of a partnership with a RESC.

[18] CSDE. Report on the Study of Small School Districts, Pursuant to Section 17 of P.A. 12-116 (*AAC Education Reform),* (October 15, 2013).

RESCs differ in costs, quality of services offered, and relationships with school districts. There is a fair amount of movement among superintendents, and those with rapport with a previous RESC may continue the relationship in their new superintendency, even if the new school district is in a different RESC catchment area.

Lastly, the projected size of the cost-savings is a consideration when deciding whether to enter a cooperative effort. One superintendent commented, for example, that the economic savings have to be significantly more than 5 percent to entice collaborations—a 20-30 percent savings might be more likely to promote or encourage regionalism.

Factor 2: Creates efficiencies or improves quality of services?

Advantages. Cooperative efforts can save time for school district personnel. For example, by sharing personnel provided by a RESC, the school district is not faced with taking time to recruit, hire, train, and supervise staff. Cooperative efforts can also reduce duplication of efforts across multiple school districts.

Another example of creating efficiencies, as described in Chapter 6, is through job-order contracting. Job order contracting (JOC) is a cooperative procurement mechanism that provides a standardized approach to routine construction projects. There appear to be both advantages and disadvantages to job-order contracting. A great number of positive testimonials about JOC, however, include that it allows routine renovations and repairs to be completed in a shorter amount of time, with less administrative overhead, and at a cost savings. It is currently a little-used area for school district construction projects.

Cooperative efforts may also be advantageous in the area of professional development. For example, in a study of Massachusetts collaboratives,[19] six ways that collaborative ventures in professional development for educators were identified:

- improves quality;
- avoids duplication of services;
- reduces administration and coordination costs;
- saves on materials cost;
- improves equity of opportunity; and
- facilitates standardization.

Barriers/disadvantages. A cooperative effort may not create efficiencies or improve quality of services. Beyond potential cost savings or cost containment, there are expectations about the quality of the collaborative service or product purchased. Some examples of reduced quality of service from a cooperative effort were provided by interviewed superintendents:

- A school district had entered a cooperative purchasing agreement and was dissatisfied with the product purchased, and subsequently withdrew from the consortium.

[19] Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research. Massachusetts Collaboratives: Making the Most of Education Dollars. (June 17, 2004/June 2005).

- A school district provides its own professional development by directly contracting with consultants and trainers because it believes it is of a superior quality compared to what is available collaboratively with other school districts or RESCs.

One explanation for why there is less regional cooperation between school districts, RESCs, and other entities in certain areas, is because partnerships have been created between school districts and local municipalities. For example, school districts and municipalities are more likely to buy heating oil or health insurance together, rather than to collaborate with another educational partner. Similarly, school districts and municipalities are more likely to share administrative or back office functions, such as financial services, and facilities and grounds maintenance, rather than are two school districts or a school district and RESC.

Single statewide school information system. One place where it was suggested there was opportunity to create efficiencies is through the adoption of a single statewide student information system (SIS) – with PowerSchool being the most frequently suggested candidate – to be largely funded and maintained through the CSDE. However, PRI staff learned of three states in which PowerSchool was adopted as the statewide SIS, with mixed results.

Generally speaking, a suggested benefit of a statewide SIS would be a lower cost for each individual district if the CSDE negotiated a single per student rate based on the total number of students in the state rather than districts negotiating based only on the number of students in each district. Another suggested benefit might be the ability of CSDE to access school and district level data directly through a statewide system, reducing the need for district personnel to generate state reports. A single statewide SIS platform could also simplify on-line access by parents who may have children in multiple districts that currently use different SIS packages.

PRI staff has also been told of potential functional challenges to establishing a statewide SIS including:

- Connecticut school districts tend to customize the ways in which they use their SISs, making it more difficult to share a uniform system;
- school districts may enter data into systems on a different schedule and very different processes; and
- establishing a single statewide SIS would likely require at least some districts to change not only a software package, but the way in which necessary data is collected and entered into the system.

Factor 3: Satisfies a need of the school district?

Advantages. Cooperative efforts can satisfy a need of the school district. Without other partners, a smaller school district, for example, would not be able to provide students with programs or services to meet certain special education needs, or provide teachers with training by nationally recognized leaders in the field. By sharing programs and services such as adult education, summer school, assistive technology, and special education transportation, school districts are able to avoid spending money to develop their own programs.

Barriers/disadvantages. When the cooperative effort does not satisfy a need of the school district, then there is little reason for a school district to participate in the effort. Regional cooperation can involve trade-offs. In return for cost savings, there may be a loss of flexibility and convenience. In the category of professional development, for example, the generic nature of training may not be tailored enough to meet unique needs of a district:

- A superintendent commented that the training offered through a RESC can be too generic, and take the attending school personnel off target.
- Sharing of professional development may not be feasible given the differences in approaches being taken by different districts to similar goals.

In the category of cooperative purchasing, there can be limitations to the particular products offered (e.g., only certain models of copier machines or computers). For example:

- A potential collaboration with another school district to purchase certain equipment did not meet the specifications of the invited district.
- School districts may each have their own computer hardware and software preferences, and it may be difficult to get a common bid list together that is not too limiting, and able to satisfy the desire for a wide variety or choice selection across multiple school districts.

Factor 4: Benefits all collaborating parties?

Advantages. Mutual benefit is a key goal for any cooperative effort. In addition to saving money, regional cooperation brings communities together. For example, in the instance of cooperative sports teams, new relationships are formed across communities and provide opportunities to establish friendships and socialize in other venues, such as community service, school dances, booster club. Parents also have the opportunity to work together on fundraisers and attendance at sporting events. Cooperative efforts may provide a setting for students to learn about other students from different backgrounds, as in the case of interdistrict cooperative grant programs.

Barriers/disadvantages. A sticking point in forming collaborations is when the proposed opportunity does not benefit all collaborating parties. In superintendent interviews regarding considerations in whether to form a cooperative agreement, the majority of superintendents mentioned that the effort needed to be mutually beneficial, regardless of who the parties were. Examples of instances where collaboration did not or would not have been beneficial to the school district:

- A program through a RESC was not meeting their student's needs, and so the service was discontinued and contracted with another provider.
- A school district sometimes asks another district to join a cooperative effort, but the approached district does not have a need for the program or service.
- A program in one school district invited another school district to form a collaborative. After attending some planning meetings, the invited district

> opted to withdraw from the potential collaborative because they felt they weren't getting significant enough attention compared to the other school district.

Another instance of the need for mutually beneficial outcomes in a cooperative effort is described in a recent CRCOG report on back office sharing.[20] In the CRCOG report, it is noted that there may be times where the equity or benefit is unequal across partners, or potential partners. The report further notes that an underlying premise of the value of sharing services is that it creates economies of scale, with the provision of more units of service resulting in lower costs per unit of service or product. If this does not occur, or is not anticipated to occur, then the cooperative effort will not be seen as beneficial, and therefore, will not be an attractive option.

In considering the benefits of all collaborating parties, the issue of competition arises. Some school districts view RESCs as competitors rather than potential partners. For example, PRI staff was told it is challenging for school districts to cooperate with RESCs when there is declining enrollment due in part to students attending magnet schools run by RESCs. There is concern that the better students are being drawn away from the school districts and toward the RESC-run magnet schools.

Some school districts may view other school districts as competitors and not want to share, for example, curriculum materials. School district rankings contribute to the atmosphere of competition among some school districts. Sharing of curricula, for example, might be viewed as giving assistance to a competitor.

One reason to form a cooperative or shared effort with other school districts is that it will save money. As noted in the 2013 CSDE report of school districts,[21] what happens to anticipated savings is a question that boards of education and municipalities may wrestle with. From the municipality's perspective, they may want to share this savings, reducing the funding required for the school district. From the school district's perspective, they would want any savings to be reinvested back into the school system. If the school district is unable to apply savings from one area of their budget to another, there is less incentive or motivation to form collaborative or shared agreements with other school districts. The CSDE report concluded that how savings from collaborations are handled, and consideration of state financial incentives (to cover feasibility studies and related legal costs related to formation of collaboration and regional efficiencies among school districts), should be addressed. Other key stakeholders interviewed for this study also pointed out that any financial savings from regional cooperation need to be protected; if the savings get taken away from the school district and put into the town budget, then a major incentive to establish cooperative efforts disappears.

Factor 5: Benefits/positively impacts students?

Advantages. An advantage of cooperative efforts may be the resulting beneficial and positive impact on students. For example, a cooperative effort can lead to the offering of a program or service that would not otherwise be available.

[20] Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG). Back Office Service Sharing: Cost Reductions and Service Quality Improvements. (December 2013).
[21] CSDE. Report on the Study of Small School Districts, Pursuant to Section 17 of P.A. 12-116. (October 15, 2013).

Another advantage to students from regional cooperative efforts can be provision of a needed program or service closer to the local school district and student's home. In the instance of separate programs for certain special education needs, a regional cooperative effort can allow a student to spend less time in transportation to the program, and participate in home school and community events. For example, an advantage of a regional transitional program for 18-21 year old high school students described in Chapter 3 is that students are placed in work settings in their home community.

Barriers/disadvantages. It may be a drawback when a cooperative effort does not benefit or positively impact students. For example, a cost-saving ridesharing effort for students from different school districts can result in longer travel time. A cooperative effort may take students out of their home districts. The needs of students have to be balanced with any cost savings resulting from regional cooperation.

Factor 6: Logistics can be worked out?

Advantages. When school districts collaborate with one another, a RESC, or other entity, there are adjustments that need to be made in order for the collaboration to take place. The long-term viability and management of a collaboration needs to be planned, and time and resources need to be set aside to establish the cooperative agreement. When the logistics can be worked out, then a partnership can move forward. During study interviews, it was noted that it is easier to work out the logistics when parties to come together to create something new, rather than try to blend or combine existing programs.

Working out the details of the agreement can result in benefits to school districts. For example, as many school districts face shrinking enrollment, classrooms may become available for use as shared space between neighboring districts that would otherwise remain empty.

Barriers/disadvantages. A deterrent to regional cooperation occurs when the details or logistics cannot be worked out by the potential partners. For example, the rural nature of some districts and the lack of geographic proximity to a RESC or potential partnering school districts can be a barrier. A school district can be one hour away from its closest RESC. Examples from interviewed superintendents of logistics creating a barrier to regional cooperation include:

- School districts were considering developing a program for a particular special education population, but transportation issues became one of the deterrents to establishing the program.
- Beyond different school calendars, there are also differences across school districts in the start times and periods ("bell times") that makes it difficult to share instructional cooperative initiatives across school districts. For example school districts have tried to share world language teachers, but because the bells and periods were not exactly the same between the schools considering collaborating on this shared specialty teacher, the idea was abandoned. Similarly, an effort was made to coordinate high school schedules to share AP courses, but the idea was abandoned because of lack of alignment of bell times.

- School districts may close, close early, or delay opening, depending on the inclement weather in the region and the decision of the school district superintendent. When programs and services are shared across school district boundaries, there can be differences in which schools are open and which are closed. For example, the topography of neighboring districts can be quite different with one hillier than the other and thus having different weather and poorer travel conditions than surrounding towns.
- Two school districts were considering sharing a speech and language pathologist, but ended up not going forward with the idea because travel time between districts needed to be included and paid for, and the school that had the professional on Mondays and Wednesdays would lose days because there are many more Monday holidays.
- Ride sharing for out-of-district special education transportation was under consideration; barriers to implementing included different bell times and students living far away from one another.
- Sometimes school districts will meet to discuss collaborative opportunities, but it is not a priority and no one follows through with the idea.

Another logistic that can be difficult to resolve is in the area of contractual agreements and collective bargaining. One barrier to sharing staff between school districts is differences in collective bargaining agreements. If the terms and conditions differ, this makes it more difficult to combine employees from two or more school districts. Also, if school districts have formal contracts for services such as transportation, it may be a challenge to form a cooperative agreement with other school districts that have contracts with different bus companies, or contract periods that end at different times. For example, three school districts tried to collaborate on general transportation, but the contractual renewal cycles differed, and the school districts were not all using the same bus company, making a joint bill unfeasible.

Factor 7: Needs of local control/politics/relationships are met?

Advantages. Cooperative efforts are more likely to go forward when they meet the needs of the school district and municipal government. Positive relationships between potential partners are often the foundation for regional cooperation.

The importance of voluntary versus forced cooperation was brought up by many key stakeholders. They commented on the need to build initial trust between the parties prior to any regional cooperation. Ideas for cooperative efforts are more likely to come to fruition if the genesis of the idea was from a group of peers, such as special education directors, rather than from a top down authority. A voluntary approach, rather than telling districts what they should do, and allowing time for the future partners to build this trust, is an important factor influencing the formation of a cooperative effort.

The importance of relationships between school districts and municipalities was raised numerous times. Based on study interviews, school districts that share services or programs are more likely to have positive relationships with municipal government leaders. On the other hand,

situations where there are negative or no relationships between school districts and municipalities makes it less likely the parties will enter into cooperative efforts.

Having a neutral and trusted person or convener in the room to negotiate an agreement may be helpful to establishing cooperative efforts. The convener can come from a RESC, COG, or other entity the parties are comfortable with.

Cooperation, communication, and flexibility were identified as key components in shared services efforts between school districts.[22]

The need for a positive relationship between the school district and RESC was also discussed in interviews with superintendents and other key stakeholders. School districts that have a good relationship with a RESC are more likely to turn to a RESC for shared programs and services. The relationship may build over time, beginning with the successful provision of one service or a single cooperative purchasing initiative.

Barriers/disadvantages. When the needs of boards of education and local municipal governments are not met, it is difficult for a cooperative effort to succeed. For example, one school district offered to be the designated high school for another school district; however, the approached district had used the same designated high school for a long time and wanted to maintain the status quo. When cooperative efforts require agreement from local officials or a municipal vote, there is the possibility that the partnership will not be approved by all parties. For example, two school districts and their municipalities tried to form a shared agreement for health insurance. However, one town voted it down, due in part to union opposition to the cooperative health insurance plan, and so it did not go forward, even though the expectation was that it would have saved all entities money.

The loss of local control is another issue frequently raised as a barrier to cooperative efforts. Some municipalities have a local culture and tradition of not sharing services or partnering regionally, feeling that town's schools are exclusively for the municipality's children. For example, a school district was interested in establishing a special education program with several school districts; however, board of education members opposed students from other towns being subsidized by their taxpayer dollars.

Other municipalities may oppose the nature of the program, such as resistance to forming a regional cooperative program for expelled students. Some municipalities do not want to share facilities or buses for a modest cost-savings.

This frequently mentioned strong preference for home rule and control is a major obstacle to regional cooperation, even with it is purely voluntary. Any tradeoff in cost savings may be weighed against this underlying value. Inherent in regional cooperation is the loss of some flexibility and possibly convenience. For example, cooperative purchasing of computers or other items may limit choice, and items not meeting the exact specifications of a school district were given as reasons for not participating in collaborations.

[22] Institute on Education Law and Policy, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Shared Services in School Districts: Policies, Practices and Recommendations. (September 2007).

To illustrate the importance of local control, PRI staff was told of a superintendent saying, "If we have one student, we are going to have our own public school." Value of local control is not unique to Connecticut. For example, the 2007 study of shared services in New Jersey school districts found home rule—defined as the right to govern in one's own district or municipality without interference by, or cooperation with, any other entity—to be an impediment to collaboration.[23] Also, in a study of Maine's 2007 enactment of mandated school district consolidation (with a goal of reducing the state's 290 districts to approximately 80), the majority of district leaders and community members interviewed disagreed with the state's approach, favoring more incentives and supports for regional collaboration and voluntary consolidation.[24]

Factor 8: School district has knowledge of opportunity?

Advantages. Being aware of an opportunity to partner is a prerequisite to forming a regional cooperation. This awareness extends to both already established regional cooperative efforts that are open to additional partner school districts as well as having knowledge that school districts have the ability to initiate a particular cooperative effort. While many district superintendents lacked awareness of particular statutes permitting regional cooperation (e.g., C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a), the fact that so many cooperative efforts were occurring suggests that this was not seen as a deterrent to forming partnerships among school districts.

Barriers/disadvantages. A barrier to regional cooperation occurs when school districts have no knowledge of the opportunity for regional cooperation. During PRI staff interviews, several key stakeholders also mentioned the lack of awareness of the advantages that certain cooperative efforts can bring to the parties. Publicizing and otherwise educating the school districts on the potential advantages of cooperative efforts could influence and encourage the formation of additional regional cooperation.

There was also confusion around whether school districts are allowed to share food services. Some school districts with an interest in exploring a partnership in this area did not proceed with initiating the effort due to belief that such a collaborative effort was not permitted.

In the category of professional development, not all superintendents and other education personnel are aware of possible training opportunities. To address this concern, PA 15-5, Section 273 (June Special Session), for example, requires the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to create and publish a calendar of learning and training opportunities in special education. Without awareness of opportunities, school district personnel are unable to join with other school districts in attending what could be a useful workshop or conference.

[23] Institute on Education Law and Policy, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Shared Services in School Districts: Policies, Practices and Recommendations. (September 2007).
[24] School District Reorganization in Maine: Lessons Learned for Policy and Process, *Maine Policy Review*, 21:2 (2012).

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Chapter 3

Instructional Cooperative Efforts

This chapter provides a more specific discussion of some of the areas for collaboration within the three instructional categories of special education, general education, and professional development. Examples of cost savings and other benefits are provided where available. The chapter concludes with recommendations for overcoming barriers and expanding beneficial instructional cooperative efforts.

Regional Cooperation and Special Education

Almost every state has some type of regional entity that assists in the delivery of special education services in an area larger than a single school district.[25] Programs and services for students requiring special education were among the earliest collaborations between school districts and RESCs, in large part due to the expense and expertise required to offer special education services and programs. In the 2013-2014 school year, approximately one in eight Connecticut public school students in grades K-12 required special education services.[26] While general education costs rose 36 percent in the past decade, special education costs rose 54 percent.[27]

Through individualized education programs (IEPs), school districts may be required to provide various related services to students including: speech and language therapy; physical therapy; occupational therapy; applied behavior analysis (ABA); or counseling with psychologists, social workers, or other clinical personnel. Multiple school districts may work jointly with a RESC or as a consortium to provide such related services to students with special education needs.

For students unable to benefit from education in mainstream classrooms, separate classrooms or schools provide both instructional and clinical support. There are also extended day services and summer/extended year services for some students receiving special education services. Older students with certain disabilities may participate in transitional programs through age 21. Delivery of such services outside of the general education program may be accomplished through cooperative efforts between school districts or in conjunction with RESCs.

This section provides detailed information about four of the more common areas of collaboration in special education: 1) separate schools or classrooms; 2) transitional services programs; 3) shared personnel; and 4) assistive technology.

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[25] Regional and Statewide Special Education Service Delivery in Selected States. *Office of Legislative Research* (Report 2015-R-0013, January 13, 2015).

[26] Connecticut State Department of Education. The Condition of Education in Connecticut: 2013-2014. Accessed September 16, 2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/board/boardmaterials040615/iii_c_receipt_of_the_report_on_the_condition_of_education_2013_14.pdf.

[27] PRI staff analysis of CSDE End-of-Year Expenditure Report (ED001) data from school years 2003-04 and 2013-14.

Regional cooperation for separate special education schools or classrooms. Private schools and RESCs often provide intensive educational services for students requiring special education services. Students may only enter a RESC special education program, for example, through the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) process—parents cannot go directly to a RESC for program admission. To compute the tuition savings realized by RESC-based intensive educational programs, the annual tuition charged by one of the RESCs, C.E.S., was compared to the average tuition of comparable private placements in the same geographic area. Overall, Example 3-A shows the C.E.S. rates to be lower than the rates at comparable private programs.

Example 3-A. FY 15 Tuition Comparison For C.E.S. and Private Programs for Students with Serious Emotional Disabilities Requiring Special Education

C.E.S. Programs for students with serious emotional disabilities or developmental disabilities cost less than private programs available to serve these students.

	Programs for Students with Serious Emotional Disabilities		**Programs for Students with Developmental Disabilities**	
	Therapeutic Day Program	1:1 Intensive Therapeutic Day Program	Developmental Learning Center*	1:1 Intensive Developmental Learning Center*
C.E.S.	**$57,036**	**$66,167**	**$68,824-$76,055**	**$89,770**
Boys & Girls Village (Charles F. Haden)	$60,450	$97,650		
Woodhouse Academy	$61,440			
High Roads Learning Center	$49,627			
Benhaven			$132,000	
Foundation School			$71,400	
CT Center for Child Development				$117,148
Giant Steps (AIND)				$125,000

* 11 month programs (10 month school year + one month summer program) with exception of Benhaven, which has a 12-month program.
Source of data: C.E.S.

Sometimes school districts get together as a group to offer a special education program. For example, a group of school districts formed the Educational Resource Collaborative (ERC) and developed the Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center with the assistance of CREC (described in Example 3-B).

Example 3-B. Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center

Population served: Primarily high school students experiencing significant difficulties in their own school, or transitioning from one educational setting to another.

Program description: Interim education setting combining academic programming, intensive therapeutic intervention, physical exercise, and psychiatric consultations and evaluation as recommended.

Collaborative partners: ERC consortium members (school districts of Simsbury, Farmington, Canton, East Granby, Southington, Granby, Plainville, Avon, RSD 10).

- Program run by CREC employees.
- Advisory Committee provides oversight. Membership is: one superintendent from ERC, one business manager from ERC, and two special education directors from participating school districts (to review budgets, establish tuition rates, etc.).

How it works:

- School districts purchase memberships, which entitle a school district to 180 days of service per school year at a FY 15 cost of $38,500.
    - School districts may buy a quarter or half membership, or 1-4 full memberships.
    - School districts pay for their membership whether they use it fully or not.
        - This ensures that the Center is staffed to capacity.
        - School districts may allocate (i.e., sell) some or all of services for a second, third or fourth membership to another participating school district.
- CREC proposes an annual budget, which is reviewed by the superintendent and business manager serving on the Advisory Committee. Any concerns are resolved through mutual agreement with the Advisory Committee and the ERC, before recommending a budget to the CREC Council for final approval.

Advantages to the model: Member school districts point out several advantages to this model: predictability of a certain portion of a school district's special education budget; oversight/control/ownership of the program through the consortium of school district members; flexibility in being able to sell what may be unused portions of membership; and a shared goal of returning students to their home schools in as timely a manner as possible. Members report the cost of the Center compares quite favorably with charges for similar services from private providers, which can be up to $100,000 per student per year. One member attributed some of the success of the program to the way the program was developed, with the school districts coming together to develop a unique design.

Regional cooperation for transitional services programs. Another example of a regional collaboration for a special education program is STRIVE, a transitional services program created by the three school districts of Guilford, Madison, and Clinton. STRIVE is a program for 18-21 year olds who have autism and/or another developmental disability. The program operates under the same type of membership model as the Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center, with each school district purchasing four slots. The STRIVE program is run by CREC employees. Early on, CREC agreed to pay for a $120,000 renovation of space for the program, and then spread school district payments for the renovation over a three year period.

Participating districts point out several advantages to the STRIVE program:

- Allows the students to receive their education and job training in the area where they are most likely to be living following graduation.

- By having the STRIVE program nearby, there are savings in transportation and in not having to hire case managers for out-of-district programs.

The Danbury Transitional Services program is an example of a shared program for 18-21 year olds that uses a tuition-in model. In the first three years, Danbury and Brookfield had a reciprocal relationship where Danbury would send students to Brookfield for Brookfield's mental health special education program, and Brookfield would send students to Danbury's transitional services program (at no cost to either school).

However, when the need for transitional services grew, with Brookfield having five students to send to Danbury's transitional services program, the two school districts developed an arrangement where Danbury was paid a flat fee of $40,000 per Brookfield student for transitional services. Brookfield considers this arrangement advantageous for a number of reasons. If Brookfield had to develop its own transitional services program, hiring teachers, job coaches, and other specialized staff, it would have cost Brookfield an estimated three to four times the current amount paid to Danbury ($40,000 vs. $120,000-$160,000 per student). Additionally, according to the superintendent, Danbury has a good program, where the students do well. The arrangement is also advantageous to Danbury because it brings in funds and also adds to the diversity of the students in Danbury's transitional services program.

Figure 3-1: Embedded Consultants in RESCs

Type of Consultant	Number Available Through All RESCs
Board Certified Behavior Analysts	37
Speech Pathologists	34
Occupational Therapists	22
Physical Therapists	20
Psychology/Behavior Specialists	17
Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants	12
Tutors	12
Assistive Technology	11
Audiologists	9
Audiology Technicians	6
Transition Specialists	6
Speech Pathology Assistants	2
Physical Therapy Assistants	1
Teachers of Visually Impaired	1

Source: RESC Special Education Programs and Services Presentation. June 12, 2014 Meeting of the M.O.R.E. Commission Special Education Select Working Group.

Regional cooperation for shared personnel. The RESCs are also a resource for school districts to obtain part-time, and/or hard-to-find personnel. Using a RESC, a district may be able to split the time of a speech and language pathologist or Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) with another district, for example. The RESC will also recruit, hire, train, and supervise the shared employees. Figure 3-1 shows the 199 consultants embedded in the six RESCs as described at a June 2014 meeting of the M.O.R.E.

Commission.[28] These consultants are RESC employees who work full or part-time in one or more local school districts.

The following are some examples of other regional collaborations that involve sharing special education personnel.

Example 3-C. Need for BCBA services met through RESC

The New London school district used to contract with Creative Intervention for BCBAs. It was very expensive: $120,000 per year for one ABA (Assistant Behavior Analyst) and one BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst) to supervise the ABA. The ABA came 2-3 times per week and the supervising BCBA (who did not do the actual therapy) came once every one to two weeks. LEARN is now used for BCBA instead of Creative Intervention (the private provider). It now costs New London $100,000 per year for one BCBA four days per week per year (10 months).

Example 3-D. Need for occupational therapist met through collaboration with another school district

Sterling had a need for an Occupational Therapist (OT) two mornings per week. Plainfield, which is also Sterling's designated high school, has a fulltime OT. The Sterling and Plainfield superintendents were at a regional superintendents' meeting where the Sterling superintendent asked the Plainfield superintendent if they had an OT person they could use two mornings per week, and Plainfield agreed. Sterling pays Plainfield for the OT's time. This arrangement is less expensive for Sterling than purchasing OT through EASTCONN, and it also helps Plainfield, who has a full time OT who had less than a full time caseload. Sterling had looked into just hiring a less expensive COTA (Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant); however, COTA's must be supervised by OTs, and Sterling would have needed to pay an OT therapist to provide supervision.

Example 3-E. Need for transition coordinator met through RESC

CREC provides a transition coordinator that splits his/her time across three school districts (Cromwell, Rocky Hill, and RSD 13). According to CREC, this effort has been in place for approximately 16 years.

The estimated cost to each district for a full-time transition coordinator would be $80,000 per year compared to the added cost of $30,000 to each district using the shared transition coordinator.

Regional cooperation for assistive technology. Some students with special needs may require assistive technology (AT) devices in order to access and participate in their educational programs. AT devices are organized into three types:

- Low-tech AT devices may be as simple as handheld magnifiers, specialized pen or pencil grips, or large print text.
- Middle of the continuum AT devices includes talking spell checkers, electronic organizers, and large computer monitors.

[28] RESC Special Education Programs and Services. June 12, 2014 Meeting of the M.O.R.E. Commission Special Education Select Working Group.

- The more expensive high-tech AT devices, which are likely to require training to utilize, include power wheelchairs or scooters and communication devices with voices.

Districts may join with other school districts or RESCs to share access to various types of AT. The following are examples of shared access to assistive technology devices and support to school districts. Note, because there is no centralized statewide AT device sharing program, SERC was required, through PA 15-5, Section 271 (June Special Session), to gather information about statewide AT sharing in the coming year.[29]

Example 3-F. RESC AT sharing program

CREC was selected through a bidding process under the CT Assistive Technology Act, to provide districts across the state with access to an Assistive Technology Consortium. There are approximately 115 districts enrolled in the Assistive Technology Consortium. The cost for membership in the consortium varies from $1,000-$5,000, depending on the number of days of technical assistance purchased. Services include a lending library, where expensive technology can be tried out before being purchased.

Example 3-G. Other entity AT sharing program

Based at Oakhill,[30] the New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) program provides information about the latest assistive technologies, including products, equipment, and services. NEAT's membership includes 33 school districts. Each school district purchases a particular package of supports such as a certain number of evaluations. While they generally do not sell devices, NEAT has many devices on site, and loans the devices to school districts to try out.[31]

Advantages to Special Education Cooperative Efforts

Make budgeting for special education more predictable. Cooperative efforts in the category of special education are considered one way for school districts and their municipalities to save money. Some shared models for special education programs address the volatility of special education costs that are due to changes in the particular needs of individual students from year to year.

Can reduce or contain special education costs. Another advantage to regional cooperation is that it can save school districts money as well as make the recruitment and hiring of qualified professionals more efficient. The RESCs often provide intensive educational services for students requiring special education services. For example, school districts may contract with a RESC to provide part-time physical therapy or speech and language services for children, rather than pay for a full-time therapist that is only needed part-time, or attempt to hire a part-time therapist.

RESCs may also work collaboratively with school districts to offer in-district services in available space. The RESC provides the needed special education programming and staff, and students from other school districts pay tuition to the host school to attend the program. In

[29] The Act directs SERC, by January 1, 2016, to complete a study on assistive technology equipment sharing that includes what kinds of devices are lent, for what period of time, who they service, and frequency of access of resources, sales of devices.
[30] Oak Hill in Hartford serves children and adults with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities.
[31] The one exception is NEAT refurbishes equipment ("First Floor") that they sell.

addition to possible tuition savings compared with private providers, there can be considerable savings in transportation costs for students requiring this type of special education setting. For example, according to one RESC director, a single school district saved approximately $250,000 in transportation costs alone by having students attend an in-district program.

Can meet the needs of students with atypical needs. While a school district may have one or two children requiring specialized services that could not be provided by the single school district, providing services to a small number of children from multiple districts creates the critical mass needed to hire staff to develop a program to address these unique needs.

Can provide needed program or service closer to local school district/student's home. In addition to tuition savings, these programs may have the benefit of keeping students either within or near their school districts and in closer geographic proximity than alternative private programs. Districts participating in cooperative special education programs often realize a significant savings in pupil transportation costs in comparison to alternative private programs. Lastly, these shared programs have the advantage of local control, being modified to meet the needs of students more easily than might occur in a comparable privately run program.

Concerns or Challenges Related to Special Education Cooperative Efforts

Cost. Sometimes collaboratives are more costly than each school district individually contracting with private providers. For example, one school district had used a RESC for PT and OT, but they were found to be too expensive, and so the district now does its own subcontracting for these services at a reduced expense.

Start-up costs. Development of a regional special education program or center often requires initial funds to re-purpose an existing space. The seed money can be a barrier to establishing a regional special education program or center. The M.O.R.E. Commission Special Education Select Working Group recommended establishing a state grant program (via bonding) to make funds available to school districts interested in developing such regional programs or centers.[32] The funds would be available for renovations or space expansions.

The legislature recently established "Technical Assistance for Regional Cooperation" grants to support plans that implement cost-saving strategies (P.A. 12-116 and P.A. 13-31). Funding for this grant program was eliminated in the FY 16 and FY 17 budget.

Several superintendents and other key stakeholders commented on the lack of funds to repurpose classrooms or unused school buildings as a barrier to establish collaborative special education programs or centers. Apparently, there is currently in statute authority (within available appropriations) for repurposing classrooms or schools for regional collaborations for special education facilities (C.G.S. Sec. 10-76e).

Unpredictability of special education costs for the school district. While school districts attempt to anticipate the needs of students as much as possible, a family with a child requiring extensive special education services could move into a town over the summer and the

[32] MORE Commission Special Education Select Working Group Recommendations for Legislative Action, February 18, 2015.

school district would not have budgeted for this expense, or a student may become newly eligible to receive such services. Alternatively, a family with a child requiring extensive special education services could move out of the school district, also impacting the school budget.

Unique needs of student. Sometimes the special education needs of a child are so unique, that there are few or no other children in the district requiring similar special education services. In such instances, the only solution may be an outplacement at a specialty or private school or program. Sometimes the needs of a child cannot be met by a more generic program run by a RESC or school district(s).

Regional Cooperation and General Education

Regional cooperation in the category of general education encompasses a wide array of programs and services ranging from co-operative sports teams to adult education programs. This section provides information on three of the more common regional cooperative efforts: 1) cooperative sports teams; 2) adult education; and 3) interdistrict cooperative grants.

Cooperative sports teams. One place where cooperation is occurring between school districts is in the area of athletics. Some school districts may not have enough interested students to field a team and through the assistance of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) division, will establish a cooperative team in a particular sport such as football. Alternatively, school districts of all sizes may choose to establish a cooperative team in a sport associated with high costs (e.g., ice hockey, which requires the renting of ice time) or with too few interested students (e.g., swimming or gymnastics). CAS/CIAC regulates the formation of cooperative high school sports teams through a formal application and approval process. The regulations include establishing maximum numbers of students per sports team, and prohibiting cuts of team members.

Example 3-H. Cooperative sports teams

Due to declining enrollment, a school district that had previously had enough students to field an ice hockey team, no longer had a sufficient number of students. By partnering with neighboring school districts in a similar situation, the schools are able to split the costs and offer an opportunity to participate on a sports team that would otherwise not be available. In superintendent interviews, cooperative sports teams were singled out as collaborations that had worked out especially well, such as co-op teams for football and ice hockey.

In general, these sports collaboratives are usually between two school districts; however, three to four school districts can get together, depending on the sport. According to CIAC, it is the most expensive sports, such as ice hockey and football, that are more likely to be shared. In the example of ice hockey, there are not many ice hockey rinks, and schools must pay for time on the ice. According to CIAC, co-op teams have kept the sport of ice hockey alive at the high school level.

Adult education. Each local or regional board of education is statutorily required to "establish and maintain a program of adult classes or shall provide for participation in a program of adult classes for its adult residents through cooperative efforts with one or more other boards of education, one or more cooperating eligible entities or a regional educational service center . .

. ."[33] Required adult education classes range from general education diploma (GED), English as a second language (ESL), and citizenship classes, to community recreational offerings such as tennis and knitting. The GED programs are provided free of charge to participants, and are supported in part by the school district where the GED student resides.

Example 3-I. Adult education

An example of cost savings through collaboration on adult education was mentioned by a superintendent regarding a GED program. Previously, the sending school district had spent $30,000-$50,000 per year for GED services for 10 students. By turning to a larger district's adult education program, this same school district is now spending $1,400 per student (or $14,000 for 10 students).

Table 3-1: School District Membership in Adult Education Programs

Type	Collaborative	# of Districts Participating
RESC-Based Adult Education Collaboratives – Two of the more rural RESCs have adult education programs, each serving all the school districts in their RESC catchment areas		
	EDUCATION CONNECTION Foothills Adult and Continuing Education)	30
	EASTCONN Community Education	36
Large Non-RESC Adult Education Collaboratives – There are four large (non-RESC) regional adult education groups, each serving 9-15 school districts		
	Branford's East Shore Region Adult & Continuing Education (ERACE)	4
	Danbury's Western Connecticut Regional Adult & Continuing Education (WERACE)	9
	Middletown Adult Education	14
	Vernon Regional Adult Education (VRABE)	15
Mid-Size Non-RESC Adult Education Collaboratives – There are six adult education consortia formed by four to six districts		
	Hamden/Bethany/North Haven/Orange/Woodbridge/RSD 5	6
	Shelton/Ansonia/Derby/Monroe/Seymour	5
	Branford/Clinton/Madison/North Branford	5
	Enfield/Granby/Somers/Suffield	4
	Farmington/Avon/Canton/RSD 10	4
	New London/Montville/Waterford/RSD 18	4
Small Non-RESC Adult Education Collaboratives – There are a six two and three district adult education partnerships		
	Westport/Weston/Wilton	3
	Fairfield/Easton/RSD 9	3
	Naugatuck/Oxford/Wolcott	3
	Stamford/Darien/New Canaan	3
	Windsor Locks/East Granby	2
	New Milford/RSD 12	2

Source: CSDE website.

[33] C.G.S. Sec. 10-69.

About three-quarters of school districts (74 percent) turn to either another school district or RESC to meet their adult education needs (Table 3-1).

Interdistrict cooperative grants. For more than 15 years, CSDE has awarded multiple interdistrict cooperative grants (IDCGs) to all six RESCs. The purpose of the IDCGs is to bring students together from across the state to improve academic performance and reduce racial, ethnic, and socio-economic isolation. The law requires school districts to provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Interdistrict cooperative grants are one way to provide this opportunity. Interdistrict cooperative grant funding was reduced by approximately $2 million from FY 15 to FY 16. There is approximately $7.2 million allocated annually for FY 16 and FY 17.

Example 3-J. Interdistrict cooperative grants

In FY 15, there were approximately 144 interdistrict cooperative grants. The grants ranged in topic from science (e.g., "Science Saturdays"), to technology ("Explorations in Engineering, Technology, Robotics and Beyond") to theater ("Looking in Theater"), to leadership ("Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership Academy").

Advantages to General Education Cooperative Efforts

There are several advantages to general education regional cooperative efforts:

Brings communities together. In the instance of cooperative sports teams, new relationships are formed across communities and provide students with an opportunity to establish friendships and socialize in other venues, such as community service, school dances, booster club, and for parents to work together. Cooperative efforts provide a setting for students to learn about other students from different backgrounds.

Increases awareness and cultural competency. In the area of interdistrict cooperative grants, the EASTCONN RESC surveyed students before and after they participated in interdistrict cooperative grant programs in their catchment area. Students were surveyed on the content specific to the grant area, and in diversity areas such as cultural competency, acceptance, and respect of others. Of the 4,900 students surveyed in September 2013 and June 2014, for example:

- 90 percent showed an increase in understanding of bullying, acceptance, and respect of others, and an appreciation of diverse peoples; and
- 80 percent showed an increase specific to the academic content of the grant area.

Additionally, 87 percent of participating district staff received training around tolerance and understanding of personal differences.

Offers students an opportunity otherwise unavailable. In the previous discussion of cooperative sports teams, the collaborations led to students having an opportunity to participate on a sports team that was not offered by the home high school due to low school enrollment or limited interest by the student body.

Can save money for participating school districts. In the earlier example of adult education, school districts can save money by joining with a larger program rather than, for example, trying to maintain a smaller program within the home school district. Instructional and other costs can be divided among more students when participating in a shared program or service such as adult education.

Concerns or Challenges Related to General Education Cooperative Efforts

Inclement weather. School districts may close, close early, or delay opening, depending on the weather in the region and the decision of the school district superintendent. When general education programs and services – as well as special education programs and services – are shared across school district boundaries, there can be differences in which schools are open and which are closed.

Cost associated with the collaborative effort. One barrier to school districts getting together to share a sports team or activity is the cost of the sports team or activity. For example, while it may save money for individual school districts already involved in a particular sport that is experiencing a shrinking team size (such as having a single coach as opposed to paying two coaches, and footing the entire bill for transportation to games as opposed to splitting the cost with one or more other school districts), these are also considered additional expenses for school districts thinking about forming a new cooperative sports team. For example, according to CAS/CIAC, it can cost $3,000 to line a football or soccer field (when you can share equipment and crew, the schools can save money) and officials fees can cost $30,000-$40,000 per team.

Different bell times and class schedules. As commented on by the superintendents, the differences across school districts in the start times and periods ("bell times") make it difficult to share instructional cooperative initiatives across school districts.

Regional Cooperation and Professional Development

Professional development can be broadly defined as assisting in the continuous professional growth of all school district employees. Beginning July 1, 2013, certified school employees[34] are required to participate in at least 18 hours of professional development (C.G.S. Sec. 10-148a). Such continuing education may be delivered through a RESC or in a cooperative effort with other boards of education. Para-professionals and other non-certified staff may also benefit from shared professional development efforts. However, based on superintendent interviews, the most common type of collaborative in professional development is training for teachers and other certified professional staff.

Content and skill areas that are of interest across school districts include training for teachers and other certified professional staff in educator evaluation, school culture and climate, and working with diverse learners. Curriculum development and establishment of professional learning communities are other aspects of professional development that may lend themselves to

[34] There are continuing education requirements, for example, for speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, and school social workers.

collaborative efforts across school districts. Teacher coaching, and grant and report writing are less frequent areas where collaborative efforts occur across school districts.

Partners in Professional Development Among School Districts

RESCs. The RESCs play a key role in providing opportunities for professional development for teachers and other certified staff. Examples of topics covered in conferences and workshops offered by RESCs include: educating students with autism and other disabilities; provision of transition services; and Connecticut curriculum standards.

CAS. Professional development is also provided by the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS). The training is primarily in the area of leadership for principals and assistant principals.

SERC. The primary role of the State Education Resource Center of Connecticut (SERC) is to provide professional development to school districts. A lot of the professional development that SERC offers is free to school districts. However, if a district needs customized, on-site assistance, there may be a fee. About 10 years ago, the focus of SERC broadened from a primarily special education resource to a "State Education Resource Center." According to SERC personnel, the center is not as well known among superintendents, but is quite familiar to special education directors. SERC often hosts training conferences on behalf of CSDE. SERC not only holds statewide sessions, but also goes directly into schools to provide educational technical assistance. SERC continues to have expertise and emphasis on professional development for special education personnel.

Example 3-K. Training by nationally recognized speakers

A district had an interest in bringing in nationally recognized speakers for professional development. The district partnered with their RESC, EDUCATION CONNECTION for a two-day workshop presented by Dr. Rick DuFour and Becky DuFour titled, "Professional Learning Communities." The fee charged by the presenters was $12,000, too great a cost for the initial district. However, by sharing the professional development with 19 other districts, the cost to the initial district with the interest in the workshop was decreased by 50 percent, to $6,000 for 63 educators to attend (@ $95.24 per person). The 19 other districts who sent a total of 77 educators to fill remaining open seats were charged $269 per person. (There were also costs to EDUCATION CONNECTION for food and support staff associated with offering this workshop).

Examples of Shared Training or Workshops

Individual school districts may join together and plan or participate in training as a group. The following examples of shared training or workshops were identified during superintendent interviews and meetings with key stakeholders:

- Windsor School District hosted a technology conference that was attended by many other districts including West Hartford and Bloomfield.
- The Cheshire, Meriden, Wallingford, and Southington school districts formed a collaborative to share professional development.
- The school districts of East Hampton, Ellington, Hebron, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, and Wethersfield participate in professional development offered by Teacher's College at Columbia University. The school districts meet to discuss the

program, including curriculum issues, and share transportation related to this training.

Advantages to Professional Development Cooperative Efforts

Saves money. In comparison to the cost of bringing in trainers for one school district, the cost can be divided among more participants by sharing the training across personnel from multiple school districts.

Offers access to national experts. Related to the financial aspect of professional development, experts in a field with a national reputation may charge relatively higher speaking/training fees. In such instances, the only way to gain access to such training, is to increase the number of participants so that the costs can be divided among more attendees.

Example 3-L. Training institute

Another example of shared training provided by EDUCATION CONNECTION was a seven day institute (five day summer institute; two day follow-up) presented by nationally recognized speaker Nancy Love titled, "Formative Assessment for Results." The fee charged by the presenter was $30,000, a cost highly unlikely to be paid by a single school district. A total of 58 participants from 13 districts attended the institute at a cost of approximately $900 per person. (Additional expenses for EDUCATION CONNECTION for food ($7,800 for breakfast, lunch, and beverages) and support staff ($230) brought the total cost of the institute to $38,030).

Concerns or Challenges Related to Professional Development Cooperative Efforts and Possible Strategies to Overcome Challenges

Cost of professional development. While professional development assists in the continuous professional growth of all school district employees, there is some cost involved, even if it is relatively less by being shared with other school districts. Some superintendents commented that there is a lot of professional development going on at the RESCs, but their rates are high.

Individuality/tailored training. Superintendents interviewed sometimes commented that the generic nature of training offered by RESCs was not tailored enough to meet the unique needs of the individual school district. There was also concern that sharing professional development might not be feasible given the differences in approaches being taken by different districts to similar goals. In general, loss of flexibility and convenience is a disadvantage of regional cooperation.

Logistics of scheduling and traveling to shared professional development. One advantage to having a uniform calendar is that school districts would have days in common that could be used to schedule professional development. Currently, with the varied school calendars, it is difficult to find shared times when such training could occur.

In the more rural parts of Connecticut, shared training may require participants to travel long distances, taking 30-60 minutes. This is a barrier to shared training in the more rural RESC catchment areas such as EDUCATION CONNECTION. The town of Brookfield, for example, is one hour away from EDUCATION CONNECTION's central office.

Lack of awareness of professional development training opportunities. Not all superintendents or district staff are aware of possible training opportunities. As noted earlier, without awareness of opportunities, school district personnel are unable to consider attending what could be a useful workshop or conference.

Recommendations for Overcoming Barriers and Expanding Beneficial Regional Cooperative Efforts

To promote possible replication, information about the advantages of the special education membership model used by such programs as the Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center and STRIVE, should be publicized to all school districts in Connecticut. Therefore, the P**RI committee recommends:**

1. Have CSDE publicize the benefits of the special education program membership model as a way to promote replication of these models in Connecticut.

As described in this chapter, lack of initial funding ("seed money") can be a barrier to establishing a special education regional cooperative program or service. Therefore, within available appropriations, the **PRI committee recommends:**

2. Legislature should consider either establishing a new grant or loan program to provide (seed) money for start-up costs for new cooperative efforts among local boards of education, or resume funding of the Technical Assistance for Regional Cooperation grants (C.G.S. Sec. 10-262t) to support plans that implement cost-saving strategies.

PA 15-5, Section 273 (June Special Session), requires SERC to establish a statewide training calendar that would include professional development opportunities in the area of special education. During interviews, PRI staff was also told the lack of awareness of professional development training opportunities extended into additional areas beyond special education. Therefore, the **PRI committee recommends that:**

3. In coordination with SERC, the RESC Alliance should develop and publicize a comprehensive list of training opportunities for school personnel. The opportunities would include both special education and general education topics sponsored or planned by school districts, RESCs, SERC, and other entities, that are open to other school districts.

Chapter 4

Cooperation Involving Student Transportation

This chapter will begin with an overview of district responsibilities in regard to student transportation and of the challenges inherent in providing transportation services. Two subsections will then describe two ways in which Connecticut districts currently cooperate around student transportation – ride sharing and requesting joint transportation bids – and the reported benefits of each. Another subsection will describe initiatives in neighboring states that may be of interest to Connecticut districts or RESCs. Final sections of the chapter will describe some of the challenges and barriers to transportation cooperation and outline findings and recommendations regarding cooperative arrangements for student transportation.

Overview

Each school district is required to transport its students (those who are district residents) to its schools[35] and to private schools within district borders.[36] A school district sending students to a designated high school in another district must provide transportation to that school.[37] Likewise, a school district is obligated to provide transportation to any of its high school students attending an out-of-district technical high school or regional agricultural science center.[38] In addition, a school district sending students at any grade level requiring special education to schools or programs outside the school district is obligated to provide those students with transportation.

Table 4-1. Connecticut Student Transportation Statistics 1992-2012

	1992-93	2002-03	2012-13[a]
Total Number of Students Transported	355,372	444,780	467,000[b]
Total Number of Buses	5,088	7,000	7,795
District Owned Buses	574	700	479
Percent Buses District Owned	11.3%	10%	6.2%
Contractor Owned Buses	4,514	6,300	7,316
Percent Buses Contractor Owned	88.7%	90%	93.8%

[a] This data was reported to be the"latest data available."

[b] This number is an estimate.

Sources: Data appeared in and was provided by School Bus Fleet Magazine. http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/research/default.aspx and was received by PRI staff on October 14, 2015.

Table 4-1 contains Connecticut data reported by a national school transportation interest group for the years 1992-93, 2002-03, and 2012-13. Three trends are evident from this data. First, the

[35] C.G.S. Sec. 10-220.
[36] C.G.S. Sec. 10-281.
[37] C.G.S. Sec. 10-277.
[38] C.G.S. Sec. 10-97.

number of school buses transporting Connecticut students has been increasing over the past 20 years. Second, the percentage of school buses owned by school districts has been decreasing. Third, the number of Connecticut students being transported by school buses has been increasing.

The increases in the numbers of students transported and buses on the road are of a greater magnitude than the increases in total student enrollment over the same twenty year period. Individuals interviewed by PRI staff indicated that this reflects several phenomena. First, students who may have previously attended schools within walking distance of their homes may now be eligible to attend schools that are no longer within walking distance, whether within their own district or in another district. In addition to technical high schools, agricultural science programs, and special education programs, this could include charter schools, magnet schools, and Open Choice schools.[39] One small district (enrolling between 1,000 and 1,999 students) sends students to five other districts – one local district, one technical high school, and three RESCs. Because each RESC operates more than one program, it is possible that the district is sending its 30 students who attend RESC programs to more than three different locations. Other reasons more students are being transported by school bus may include changes in the laws regarding teen driving or fewer parents choosing to transport their children to school.

Shared Bus Routes – Ride Sharing

The opportunity to realize efficiencies in transportation by having a single bus pick up students from two or more districts who are traveling to the same destination is available to almost all school districts. In response to PRI's survey of school superintendents, at least 14 districts (25 percent) reported that they shared one or more bus routes to out-of-district general education programs with at least one other school district. Well over half of all surveyed superintendents (61 percent) indicated that they did so for out-of-district special education programs. There were no notable differences in whether districts did so based on size category or RESC, but there was significantly more ride sharing among districts in a group that included DRGs D, E, and F, than there was in the group that included G, H, and I (see Figure 1-12 in Chapter 1). The DRGs contain groups of districts matched on community socio-economic criteria and districts in DRGs E and F are largely clustered in the more rural northwest and eastern parts of the state. Moreover, although almost one-half of all Connecticut districts are in DRGs D, E, and F, only 24 percent of students reside in those districts, suggesting that ride sharing is often driven by the need to transport small numbers of students to out-of-district

[39] Since the mid-1990s, the increased number of charter schools, magnet schools, and the Open Choice Program, also mean that there are an increased number of destinations to which students must be transported from their home districts. Although PRI staff was unable to identify a source from which to determine how many more schools there are now than in 1995, publically available data shows that there were 33 more public schools in Connecticut in 2013 (1,161) than there were in 2004 (1,128). Although this may not seem like a large increase in number of schools, it should be noted that this is occurring even while the total number of students decreased 5.5 percent between 2004 and 2013. In addition to the increased number of schools, many schools are now attended by students from multiple districts, and individual districts may be busing students to more schools both within and outside of that district. Some schools that were attended by only in-district students in the mid-1990s may now be magnet schools attended by students from several other districts as well. Even a small magnet school with only 200 or 300 students may be attended by students from several communities, traveling varied distances, and from different directions. One magnet school that opened in 2013, for example, is attended by 300 students from 21 different municipalities.

locations and the desire to realize economies of scale by cooperating with other districts having the same need.

Opportunities for "ride sharing" may be identified by school district administrators or by transportation providers – whether private carriers or RESCs. Two superintendents or special education directors, for example, may become aware that they are both transporting a small number of students to the same out-of-district program. This may launch a discussion of whether there is a way that one vehicle can be used to transport the students from both districts. If one of the districts owns and operates its own buses, this may be a simple matter of executing a memorandum of understanding providing that one district be reimbursed by the other for some portion of the cost of the route. Example 4-A describes the kind of cost savings that may be associated with such arrangements.[40]

Example 4-A. Cost Savings Association with Ride Sharing

Special Education: One Connecticut district has a contract with a private carrier for van service to an out of district special education program at the rate of $182 a day ($32,760 for 180 school days). If that district is able to transport a student from a neighboring district to the same program, each district could pay one-half of the daily rate ($91) and 180 days of transportation would cost each district $16,380 rather than $32,760, representing a savings of $16,380 a year.

General Education: One Connecticut district reported paying $30,000 a year for a van to transport from one to five students each year to a technical high school. That district was able to arrange to have its technical high school students bused to the high school attended by other district students and then to ride a second bus with that district's student to a technical high school for $1,200 per student per year. Based on the report that no more than five students a year were electing to attend the technical high school, the annual cost would be $6,000 a year, representing a savings of $24,000.

If a RESC is a school district's transportation provider, the RESC may identify the possibility for or facilitate ride sharing. As shown in Table 4-2 each of the six RESCs provides transportation services for students receiving special education.[41,42] When RESCs provide out-of-district special education transportation, they are often in a position to suggest ride sharing to the districts they serve. Note the numbers of districts served reflected in Table 4-2 are those to which each RESC provides transportation, not the total number of destinations to which each RESC transports students. EDUCATION CONNECTION, for example, has contracts to provide transportation to 28 districts, but transports students from those 28 districts to 41 different locations.

Private carriers with whom PRI staff spoke also noted that if they see an opportunity for two districts to share a route they will often

[40] It should also be noted that, in addition to potential cost savings, there are the same incidental benefits to ride sharing as to any other form of carpooling. This includes reducing the numbers of vehicles on the road and decreasing greenhouse gas emission.

[41] Some of the RESCs also: provide transportation to their own magnet schools, provide transportation to other school districts for general education students, and provide transportation or manage contracts for regional open choice transportation. Although Table 4-2 identifies three RESCs as reporting that they provided general education transportation to local school districts, PRI decided to omit any discussion of transportation to RESC magnet schools and through the open choice program as these are more reflective of various kinds of educational choice programs rather than service sharing between boards of education. In addition, many of the RESCs also provide transportation services to other partners, including municipal agencies and private non-profit human service agencies for the transportation for adults, individuals with special needs, and the elderly.

[42] The PRI survey did not collect information about ride sharing to magnet schools, charter schools, or through the open choice program.

suggest that they do so, as it is more convenient for the carrier as well as being more cost efficient for the involved districts. A number of school superintendents participating in the PRI survey not only reported that they had "ride sharing" with another district for out-of-district destinations but that they had implemented this arrangement at the suggestion of their contracted transportation provider.

Table 4-2: Summary Data for RESC Provided Transportation (2014)

	Number of Vehicles Owned	Total Number of Districts Served	Average Daily Number of Pupils Transported	Approximate Annual Pupil Transportation Mileage	Districts Served Special Education	Districts Served General Education
ACES	121	12	506	1,000,000	12	N/A
C.E.S.	18	16	56	303,825	16	N/A
CREC	35	6	175	664,693	6	N/A
EASTCONN	120	29	489	2,500,000	19	19
EDUCATION CONNECTION	122	28	204	2,200,000	28	10
LEARN	39	8	103	985,000	6	2

Source: PRI staff compilation of RESC data.

Joint Requests for Proposals and Parallel Contracts

A less frequently used method of cooperative transportation procurement occurs when school districts work together and issue a single RFP soliciting a single bid for the provision of either general education or special education transportation services to each involved district. Following the consolidated bidding process, each district then enters a separate contract with the transportation company, although the terms of each contract are consistent with the specifications of the joint bid.

One example of such a process involved the towns of Plymouth, Wolcott, and Thomaston. One district administrator reported that it took three years to get the individual transportation contracts for each of the three towns on the same bidding cycle, one year to agree upon a shared school calendar, and several months to reach agreement on what "extras" (i.e. GPS tracking, on-board cameras) they wanted included in the joint RFP.[43] One superintendent

[43] The Plymouth, Wolcott, and Thomaston districts began exploring the cooperative bidding of transportation contracts in response to Public Act 10-167 (codified at Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 10-266m(6)). That act created an incentive for the formation of regional transportation agreements by providing that if two or more districts formed a cooperative transportation arrangement pursuant to Sec. 10-158a during fiscal year 2011, and the Commissioner of Education determined that cost savings had resulted therefrom, the municipality in which the district was located would receive additional transportation grant money in an amount equal to 50 percent of the amount that the municipality would have received in in the absence of such an arrangement, in addition to any amounts due based on the actual expenses. By the time the districts had taken the necessary steps to issue a joint RFP and award contracts the incentive was no longer available.

reported that there were some modest initial cost savings and then the annual costs increases following the joint request for bids was lower than it would have been without this cooperative effort.

On the eastern side of the state another group of districts worked with CREC to develop a collaborative bidding process that allowed carriers to submit either or both individual district bids and collaborative bids. These districts included Somers, Ellington, Vernon, and Manchester. As a result of this process, three of the participating towns did enter into contracts based on the collaborative bid, while the remaining district entered into a contract with the same carrier for a slightly lower rate based on the individual bid that carrier had been able to provide only to that district. One superintendent reported estimated savings on transportation of two to three percent from the immediately prior budget year, and the CREC consultant who assisted in the bidding process noted that the annual increases in the new contracts were also less than they would have been without the joint bidding process.

Initiatives in Other States

During the course of the study, it was suggested that PRI staff look at student transportation initiatives in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Rhode Island has taken steps towards a long term goal of developing a statewide transportation plan for all school students. In Massachusetts, a multidistrict educational collaborative provides transportation services at lower costs than could be obtained using private carriers.

Its small size and population density make Rhode Island the ideal laboratory for a regional statewide student transportation plan. In 2009 the Rhode Island legislature adopted the long-term goal of the Rhode Island Department of Education overseeing a statewide plan for the transportation of all students to all in- and out-of-district schools.[44] At the same time, the legislature directed the Rhode Island Department of Education to start its progress toward this goal by focusing on the development of a system for transporting all students who attend schools outside the home district, whether private, parochial, or charter schools, or career and technical education centers, or special education programs.[45] The first statewide out-of-district student transportation contract was entered into for the 2009 school year, starting with those districts that did not have contractual obligations to a private carrier for out-of-district transportation. Additional districts were added to the statewide plan as their contracts expired. Notable features of the Rhode Island out-of-district student transportation plan are the division of the state into transportation regions – with the expectation that students will attend out-of-district schools within their region to the extent possible, and the understanding that students from multiple districts and/or students attending multiple destination schools may be transported on the same buses.

Recent Connecticut legislation, while not as extensive as the Rhode Island plan, does demonstrate interest in moving toward some degree of regionalization of transportation, starting with special education. Public Act 15-5 (June Spec. Sess.), Sec. 275, requires each RESC to develop a regional special education transportation plan and submit it to the State Board of

[44] Rhode Island Public Laws 2009, Chapter 5, Article 12, Section 2, codified at R.I.Gen.Laws Secs. 16-21.1-8.
[45] Rhode Island Public Laws 2009, Chapter 5, Article 12, Section 2, codified at R.I.Gen.Laws Secs. 16-21.1-7.

Education and the legislature's education committee by October 1, 2016. This public act followed a 2011 study on regionalization of student transportation and uniform school calendars.[46] That study remains relevant and will no doubt inform each RESC as it develops a regional special education transportation plan. In turn, the regional special education transportation plans currently under development may lead to further RESC facilitation of regional cooperation in the realm of both special education transportation and other out-of-district transportation over the next few years.

PRI staff spoke to a few superintendents who had experience in or knowledge of a transportation collaborative formed by a group of school districts in south central Massachusetts known as the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative (LPVEC). This collaborative was formed pursuant to a Massachusetts law allowing two or more school districts to provide shared services to complement the educational programs of the member school districts in a cost-effective manner.[47] Some of the earliest services provided by the LPVEC were related to special education and vocational-technical education. Starting in 1991, the LPVEC provided transportation services, first to its own schools and then also to the schools within its member districts.

Currently, the LPVEC website reports that it operates over 250 vehicles housed at four separate facilities and employs over 300 drivers and monitors, in addition to managers, mechanics, and clerical staff.[48] Some of the reported advantages to districts using the LPVEC's transportation services are similar to the advantages to Connecticut districts utilizing RESC based services. These include that the collaborative, as a public organization, operates its services without a profit margin, or, to quote the authorizing statute "a primary purpose of such programs and services shall be to complement the educational programs of member school committees and charter schools in a cost-effective manner."[49] In addition to the collaborative being governed by its member districts, as the Connecticut RESCs are, the fact that the collaborative owns its own vehicles and employs its own transportation staff results in greater efficiency in distributing fixed costs across member districts so that when the needs of districts change, either in connection with regular routes or for transportation on field trips or for special events, districts only need to pay extra fees associated with fuel and personnel. [50]

Barriers and Challenges to Transportation Cooperation

In addition to the sheer magnitude of the school transportation task, which presents both challenges and opportunities for cooperation, there are other considerations for districts interested in finding transportation efficiencies. Geography, travel times, and differing school schedules were the barriers districts and transportation providers mentioned most frequently. There can also be situations where a district or the community it serves does not want students at

[46] RESC Alliance. A Feasibility Study of Implementing Regional Transportation and Uniform School Calendars. (2011).
[47] Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. Chapter 40 Sec. 4e.
[48] See http://www.lpvec.org/transportation, accessed on November 13, 2015.
[49] Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. Chapter 40 Sec. 4e.
[50] Stanley, M.C. Massachusetts Collaboratives: Making the Most of Education Dollars. Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research (June 2004/2005).

different grade levels to be on the same bus, and there are students with unique needs who may require individual transportation services even to schools attended by other district students.

Geography and travel times. School buses are operating primarily on local roads and often during busy traffic times. Depending on the size of a school district and population density, some transportation routes may be only a few miles long and others may extend for 20 or 30 miles. A bus route covering a short distance with many stops and many students to pick up may take almost as long as a much longer route with only a few stops for a smaller number of students. Particularly with young students who travel long distances, there may be political opposition to adding more stops to pick up additional students closer to the final destination because it would mean that students who had boarded the bus much further away spent even longer on the bus than is necessitated by the distance travelled. This may be the case when a bus looks practically empty when it arrives at an urban school from a suburban or rural community. In addition, even when schools are located close to each other (such as when a technical high school is located within a few miles of a local or regional high school), different starting and ending times may make the sharing of a single bus route difficult.

Restrictive contract language. Although some district administrators expressed concern that a barrier to sharing transportation services is contract language with a private student transportation provider, this is not uniformly the case with ride sharing of individual out-of-district routes. Many school districts have multiple transportation contracts. This can include one provider for in-district transportation and another for out-of-district transportation or one provider for general education student routes and another provider for special education student routes. In some districts there may be multiple providers for out-of-district transportation, or a primary provider that has the ability to decline to provide additional routes when the district has a need for transportation of a single student to a new out-of-district destination. The RESC Alliance feasibility study on regional transportation contains an appendix which details the various types of contracts districts may have with transportation providers.[51] The variety of possible arrangements suggests that districts can negotiate contracts with some flexibility in cases where ride sharing may be feasible with another provider, or, if a situation arises in the middle of the contract term, to ask the contracted private carrier to make an exception to allow individual students to be transported by another district's carrier.

Communication. The biggest challenge to ride sharing seems to be the identification of possible partners. Although districts typically know which other districts send students to the same technical high school or agricultural science center, there is no structured way for a district to find out what neighboring districts may be sending students to the same special education program. Although a common transportation provider may advise two districts that they could share a route provided by that carrier, districts who are using different transportation providers would not necessarily know which other districts to approach in order to identify ride sharing partners. Currently, special education directors may pick up the phone and ask colleagues in other districts if there are any ride sharing opportunities to various destinations, but there are many competing demands on administrators' time.

[51] RESC Alliance. A Feasibility Study of Implementing Regional Transportation and Uniform School Calendars. (2011).

Despite the best of intentions, such phone calls may not be made consistently or to all possible partner districts. EASTCONN, at the request of some of its member districts, is working on developing a shared database in which districts can post out-of-district special education destinations and look to see what other districts are sending students to the same location. This database should be available late in 2015 and some initial information about how well it has worked should be available by the end of the 2015-16 school year.

Limited cost savings through joint RFPs. In relation to joint RFPs for transportation contracts, despite anecdotal reports of initial cost savings and cost containment, there is no real consensus on the benefits of this form of cooperation. The reported cost savings have been modest (2-3 percent). In both of the examples that PRI staff learned about, the same transportation companies were providing services to the same districts both before and after the joint bidding process. Moreover, the first time the eastern group issued their joint RFP there were no bids. Bids were only received after the RFP was reissued in a form that allowed both joint bids and individual bids for each district. PRI staff learned of a few other sets of districts that had contemplated jointly bidding transportation services. In some situations the districts decided, upon further exploration of this option, that it would not result in cost savings or other efficiencies, and chose not to issue a joint RFP. In one of these situations, no transportation company made a bid in response to the joint RFP, and the districts proceeded to issue individual RFPs.

PRI staff spoke with representatives of the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA), an industry group for student transportation providers. The interviewees acknowledged that student transportation providers have historically been reluctant to get involved in multi-district bids.[52] Carriers appear to believe that, for most districts, the number of buses needed and the specific routes to be driven are known quantities and new contracts are negotiated based simply on the costs to provide that known quantity of service in light of rising costs for buses, fuel, and labor. When districts bid together, there are limited opportunities for efficiencies because the same students are still going to the same schools, with the same start and end times for the school day. According to COSTA, some efficiency may be achieved by establishing a shared calendar, or by changing start and end times to facilitate tiered bus routes, but unless a group of districts is able to reduce the total number of school buses needed for each school day, these savings are likely to be minimal. This view was echoed by personnel with transportation responsibilities at RESCs and at CSDE as well as by district superintendents who gave this as a reason why they were not further exploring joint bidding of transportation for general education students attending in-district schools.

[52] It should also be noted that some grade-limited regional school districts may either jointly bid transportation contracts with the associated elementary districts or enter into a single contract pursuant to which a private carrier serves each elementary district and the regional school district. It is believed that private carriers do not generally view such situations as involving a joint bid or request for a multidistrict contract because the regional school district and its associated elementary districts may act as a single administrative entity in other regards as well (i.e., shared superintendent, shared special education services, and shared food services).

Recommendations Related to Cooperation Involving Student Transportation

PRI finds that Connecticut districts are clearly interested in sharing transportation to out-of-district destinations for both general education and special education students and that many districts currently do so and report cost savings as a result. Therefore, the **PRI committee recommends that:**

4. **RESCs should look for structured ways to facilitate communication between districts about opportunities to share rides to out-of-district destinations.**

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Chapter 5

Cooperation Involving Administrative and Back Office Functions

Many stakeholders have expressed a belief that school districts can realize both costs savings and other efficiencies in relation to non-instructional activities. One example would be two or more small districts sharing a superintendent, business manager, or special education director. Another would be shared administrative or functional departments such as in food services, finance, information technology, or building and grounds management. As part of this study, PRI looked into what sort of cooperation was occurring around administrative and back office functions and the benefits and challenges associated with such cooperation.

Several districts reported to PRI staff that they share administrative and management level staff, including: business managers; facilities directors; IT directors; and food service directors. Table 5-1 indicates, based on all available sources of information,[53] the number of arrangements PRI staff was able to identify involving such shared administrative and operations management staff. The majority of operations management staff sharing arrangements involve a BOE and a municipality rather than two BOEs or a BOE and a RESC. The only operational managers shared between two or more boards of education are those overseeing food services. Therefore, the first subsection will address shared foodservices. The next two subsections will address shared information technology and shared business or human resources management – collectively referred to as back office services – as these are the areas where there is some degree of cooperation evident involving RESCs. The remaining subsections of the chapter will address shared facilities management and PRI findings and recommendations. The sharing of superintendents, which does not currently occur between any Connecticut districts except those

Table 5-1: Identified Arrangements to Share Administrative and Operational Staff

	Sharing arrangement with another district	Sharing arrangement with a RESC	Sharing arrangement with a municipality
Business Manager	1[a]	2	8
HR Director	0[a]	1	4
Facilities Director	0	0	5
IT Director	0[a]	2	18
Food Service Director	14	6	N/A

Notes:

[a] These items are exclusive of regional school districts that have centralized administration for the RSD and one or more of its associated elementary districts.

Sources: PRI staff compilation of PRI survey data, CASBO Shared Services Whitepaper (2015) information, and PRI staff interviews.

[53] The primary source of the data reported in Table 5-1 was the PRI superintendent survey. Additional sources of data were examples identified by the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) and described in their 2015 White Paper on Shared Services (which is described in detail in Appendix E) and interviews with both school and town administration and leadership.

associated with regional school districts, will be discussed in Chapter 7, which addresses regional school districts and other regional cooperative educational efforts.

With the exception of the food services section, this chapter will not present information about specific cost savings. In connection with information technology, back office service sharing, and facilities management, no district volunteered specific cost saving information. Moreover, most persons interviewed, whether connected with town government or BOE administration, indicated that such service sharing was not typically undertaken with the express purpose of saving money and that the efficiencies realized typically had more to do with improved communication, transparency, and increased capacity to utilize existing employees and processes.

Shared Food Services

Almost all of Connecticut's 166 local and regional school districts have a food service program, and 90 percent of the schools in those districts that have food service programs meet the standards of the United States Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Participation in the NSLP is a relatively complex endeavor, requiring detailed recordkeeping including determination of student eligibility for free and reduced price meals and documentation of how many meals are sold to students according to this status. In addition, each meal, and the foods of which those meals consist, must meet federally defined nutrition requirements. A more detailed explanation of how the NSLP operates can be found in Appendix F.

Because the majority of Connecticut schools and school districts participate in the NSLP, this section will focus specifically on the ways in which school districts realize efficiencies in food services while meeting the requirements of the NSLP. There are two main ways districts can do so. One way is by two or more districts sharing a single food service director, who has duplicate responsibilities in each district. The other way is by one school district or RESC operating, or overseeing one or more aspects of, a food service program in another school district. This section will discuss the two ways in which districts were found to be sharing food services and the benefits and challenges of doing so.

Sharing food service directors. PRI staff identified five shared food service directors who collectively oversee the food service programs in 14 Connecticut districts. Three of these food service directors serve:

- Avon, Canton, and Regional School District 10 (combined enrollment of 7,620);
- Regional School District 14 and Regional School District 15 (combined enrollment of 5,847); and
- Ansonia and Derby (combined enrollment of 3,815)

The other two shared food service directors serve both a regional school district and its affiliated elementary districts, as is the case in:

- Easton, Redding, and Regional School District 9 (combined enrollment of 3,081); and

- Chester, Deep River, Essex, and Regional School District 4 (combined enrollment of 2,044).

The combined enrollments of the districts overseen by each shared food service director are less than the enrollments in each of Connecticut's 13 largest districts. Only the group including Avon, Canton, and Region 10 consists of over 7,200 students.

Other cooperative food service efforts. Some districts report that it can be challenging to secure a food service director, most commonly for reasons relating to district location, district size, or district resources. As a result, many districts have opted to contract out their food service operations to a commercial vendor. When this occurs, districts retain responsibility for the recordkeeping and reporting requirements relating to individual students' free or reduced lunch eligibility, and have ultimate responsibility for compliance with the NSLP nutrition standards, while the vendor has the day-to-day responsibility for procuring, preparing, and serving NSLP-compliant meals. For some smaller districts, particularly in more rural areas of the state, it may be difficult to find either a satisfactory food service director or a food service vendor interested in overseeing operations based on the small size and location of the district's school or schools. Such districts are among those that have entered into cooperative or shared services with RESCs or other districts.

At least two RESCs indicated that when they establish a magnet school in a school district they offer that school district an opportunity to operate food services at the magnet school. When this happens, the host school district is essentially the vendor for the RESC magnet school food service program, and, depending on the specific agreement, either the RESC or the meal providing district will be the food service authority responsible for NSLP recordkeeping and reporting requirements. In at least one district in eastern Connecticut this situation is reversed, with EASTCONN operating a food service program for its own schools as both the school food authority and the meal provider and also providing the food service program in one very small single-school district, with that district being reported as one of the sites at which that RESC's own NSLP is operated. Staff at CSDE also reported a longstanding arrangement between Coventry and Andover where Coventry provides NSLP meals in Andover as if it were a part of its own school system.

EDUCATION CONNECTION in northwestern Connecticut established a food services department not because it needed to provide services in its own schools but because a number of districts in its catchment area indicated that they found the provision of food services challenging and asked that the RESC develop capacity in this area to provide them with support. As a result, EDUCATION CONNECTION now assists with the provision of food services in at least five different districts, although each district has arranged to receive a slightly different package of services based on their specific needs. Each of the following districts, for example, pays EDUCATION CONNECTION a fee for its services in lieu of employing school district staff to oversee and manage all aspects of the district's food service program:

- EDUCATION CONNECTION provides the oversight of a food service director for one very small, single school K-8 district – primarily to plan menus and oversee purchasing – and also places one full-time employee on-site as kitchen manager, while the district

retains responsibility for recordkeeping and reporting for the free and reduced price federal school lunch program.

- In another very small district EDUCATION CONNECTION acts as the food service director but has no on-site staff. In this K-12 district the RESC-based food service director handles menu planning, purchasing, accounts payable and receivable, and also the recordkeeping and reporting for the NSLP.

- In a larger district, one with over 4,000 students in seven different schools, EDUCATION CONNECTION has no full-time on-site staff, but provides district-wide oversight for: menu planning; recordkeeping and reporting relating to the NSLP; purchasing; and accounts payable and receivable.

Benefits to shared food services. As illustrated by both the existence of shared food service directors and the arrangements several different districts have made with EDUCATION CONNECTION, a single food service director can effectively serve multiple smaller districts by overseeing programs that are implemented by staff within the district. As shown in Example 5-A, there can also be some cost saving associated with doing so. Not only can planning and ordering processes be streamlined across districts, but districts sharing food services oversight may also realize economies of scale in relation to sharing menus, food and supplies ordering, and otherwise operating as a single entity in relation to vendors.

Logistically, the sharing of a food service director is feasible because the responsibilities are largely administrative and managerial, with day-to-day delivery of food services being conducted at each school building by an on-site food service manager and subordinate food service staff. Sharing one food service director across two or more school districts replicates the role of a food service director in a large multi-school district. Both the Avon-Canton-Region 10 food service director and the EDUCATION CONNECTION food service director oversee programs in districts serving a combined total of between 7,000 and 8,000 students.

Example 5-A. Savings on Cooperative Food Services

EDUCATION CONNECTION food service staff report that a full-time food service would earn a salary of $50,000 to $75,000 thousand dollars a year. Each of the five districts served by EDUCATION CONNECTION pays an average of $30,000 for the package of food services management services provided.

Similarly, the contract between Avon, Canton, and Region 10, which was provided to PRI staff, results in the three districts splitting the costs of one food service director and an administrative assistant equally. Although those districts did not share with PRI staff the specific amount each district paid, it is apparent that if each district employed its own food service director and administrative assistant the three districts collectively would be paying at least twice what they do with the shared arrangement.

The primary difference between serving one large district as compared to several smaller districts is that instead of maintaining and submitting one set of district-wide reports, a shared food service director must submit separate paperwork for each of the districts for which he or she provides services. It is because EDUCATION CONNECTION's services to districts do not universally include the responsibility of NSLP recordkeeping and reporting for each separate district served that PRI staff has characterized them as cooperative food service efforts rather than as simply a shared food service director. The duplicative paperwork requirement was noted

by many interviewees as the most burdensome duty of a shared food service director, particularly when the districts sharing the food service director are serving the same menus on the same days.

Barriers to sharing food services. The most significant barrier PRI found to sharing food service directors and operations was confusion among district and RESC personnel about what kinds of sharing of food services would be consistent with the USDA regulations governing the National School Lunch Program. Many district and RESC personnel interviewed thought that while sharing a food service director was allowed, one district providing food service to another district as part of its own food service program was not permitted.

CSDE clarified to PRI that it is permissible for districts to have another school district run their food service program. CSDE staff indicated that some districts report being unable to either provide food services to another district or to become a part of another district's food service program due to local charter requirements or a reluctance to give up the district's independent food service program even if it is operating at a loss.

In addition, efficiencies beyond a food service director's salary are often based on working off a common price list, with common vendors, and serving a common menu. Sharing of food service operations may not be feasible for districts unable to serve a common menu. One shared food service director, for example, noted that one of the reasons she was able to provide services in multiple districts was because the students in each district were demographically similar and familiar with and comfortable eating the same foods and the same meals.

Shared Information Technology

Elements of information technology can be both operational and instructional. On the operational side are the hardware and software systems involved in: business and financial management; human resources; phone, email and other communications systems; and student record keeping. On the instructional side is the use of computers, tablets, and other devices as well as various software packages to give students access to instructional content, and to support them in time and work management.

While approximately one quarter of superintendents surveyed by PRI staff reported sharing some aspect of information technology with another BOE or RESC, over half of all superintendents reported collaborating with the local municipality. Based on data collected through PRI's superintendent survey, Table 5-2 summarizes the various IT areas and cooperative partners. There is very little IT sharing directly between two districts, except in relation to end user training. Districts cooperate indirectly, however, through the activities of the RESCs, particularly in relation to software licensing and hosting agreements, which may be arranged by the RESCs for the purpose of benefitting multiple districts. This section will outline a range of shared services relating to IT, first in relation to hardware and personnel, then in relation to various platforms and software packages.

Table 5-2: Information Technology Cooperation

	Sharing with another school district	Sharing with a RESC	Sharing with a municipality
Shared computer hardware[a]	0	1	20[b]
Shared IT Director	0	2	16
Other Shared IT Staff[a]	0	1	14
Website maintenance	0	2	5
End user training	5	7	7
Shared back office software platforms (e.g. MUNIS, Aspen)	0	1	28
Student information system software (e.g. PowerSchool)	0	5	0
Learning management software (e.g. BlackBoard, Schoology)	0	6	1
On-line learning software (e.g. Virtual High School)	1	9	1

[a] These items are taken from responses to CASBO's shared services survey rather than the PRI superintendent survey.

[b] Includes two districts reporting a municipality is solely responsible for computer hardware.

Sources: PRI staff analysis of PRI survey data and, where indicated, CASBO survey data.

Hardware and network access. Before discussing how districts may share IT services with other districts, RESCs, municipalities, or other entities, it is helpful to consider what kinds of systems are involved in providing IT services and ways in which these systems may be shared. The ability to share access to such systems, or for these systems to communicate with each other, can play a role in determining what further IT service sharing is possible.

Historically, prior to the year 2000, a school might have had personal computer stations for its students or staff to use for specific functions. In some districts, a school or administrative building might have a central server to which multiple user stations were connected for purposes of accessing information or other resources, and storing data. While the internet existed, there were often limited opportunities for high speed internet access outside cities and large towns. As a result, there was little sharing of IT hardware or software beyond building walls, much less across municipal or district borders.

Some schools or districts may be continuing to rely on in-house hardware with much of their software maintained on a central server or individual workstations. More and more, however, the power of information technology lies less in a district's on-site infrastructure than in its ability to reliably, securely, and quickly send and receive information through the internet,

and to manage and process vast amounts of data relating to both operations and instruction. A large part of many school district's IT infrastructure consists of the hardware it uses to access the internet and off-site and cloud-based servers.

Starting in the year 2000, the state of Connecticut created the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) with the goal of insuring that all school districts in Connecticut would have access to reliable, high-speed internet services regardless of location. In 2010, CEN, in partnership with similar statewide network initiatives within the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) and Department of Administrative Services (DAS), received a federal grant to significantly upgrade and expand Connecticut's broadband communication infrastructure in order to improve public safety and education services across the state. This project was called the Nutmeg Network. The CEN continues to be the entity responsible for managing non-public safety related access to the Nutmeg Network. As of 2015, all school districts in Connecticut have free access to this network, although not necessarily in every school building. Districts are responsible for establishing and maintaining the necessary hardware within district borders to ensure access to CEN from all sites once CEN has been connected to one point in the district.

In response to CASBO's 2015 shared services survey, 20 districts reported that they either shared responsibility for computer hardware with a municipality or that a municipality was completely responsible for managing and maintaining the district's computer hardware (24 percent). In conducting the PRI superintendent interviews, staff learned that in most cases this sharing of hardware resources with a municipality involved the school district's IT hardware also being used for a town's governmental administrative offices. Such arrangements seemed to arise in situations where a school district's central office was located on the same site or very close to town government offices. The sharing of the school district hardware with the municipality may reflect the availability of CEN and school district development of sophisticated hardware systems, and the capacity to manage them, much earlier than municipalities.

Proximity of educational and governmental buildings also seems to play a role in whether a school district and municipality can benefit from sharing a contract for other kinds of information and office hardware, particularly phone systems. Neither CASBO's survey nor PRI's survey of superintendents specifically asked districts about whether there was a single phone system being shared between the district and its municipality, but a few superintendents made reference to this when participating in the PRI survey. PRI staff heard from some superintendents that there was a single phone system maintained by a single vendor, or that the town and district had purchased a single phone system and worked collaboratively on the installation and setup. Other superintendents said that the town and/or district had looked into sharing a phone system but found it would not result in any cost savings due to school buildings and government buildings not being co-located.

IT staffing. Based on not only the speed and capacity of CEN/Nutmeg Network, but also on increasing needs to access, store, and disseminate information electronically, governmental entities and school districts – like other businesses and even individual technology users – have begun relying on remote and cloud-based servers rather than maintaining all data and programs within district borders. As a result, districts may have both on-site and network-based resources to manage. Thus, a district needs IT staff able to manage hardware and the technical aspects of

its system. IT staff must also support use of a variety of software packages ranging from finance and office software on individual workstations, to student information system (SIS) software that might be remotely hosted on a server far outside the school district. Districts may also need IT staff to train and support students and staff in using various software packages.

Some Connecticut RESCs offer IT services to districts on an *a la carte* or consulting-type basis. This allows districts to rely upon a RESC to either supplement in-house resources or, in the case of very small districts with limited resources, to essentially become the school district's IT director, or even the district's entire IT department. Such arrangements are facilitated by CEN, as RESC-based consultants can remotely monitor, update, and manage the computer resources in a district through the network. In one small district, the superintendent explained that the district has no specialized IT staff. She and her fellow administrators run the IT system in addition to their other duties, supplemented by approximately 150 hours of consulting from their RESC each year.

PRI found no differences in prevalence of shared IT staff by district size, DRG, and geographic location. Examples of districts sharing IT staff other than directors occurred in all RESC catchment areas with the exception of the southcentral ACES region.

PRI staff learned that sharing IT resources with a municipality generally took the form of the school district's IT department also having responsibility for managing the hardware and software systems for the town's governmental administrative offices. Sometimes, however, superintendents indicated that the town had one or more employees who could be called upon to troubleshoot for the district's technology systems. The somewhat greater frequency with which district staff supported town IT requirements reflects that school districts typically have both broader and deeper needs for IT and thus more diversely skilled IT professionals. Illustrative of the fact that school districts typically have the dominant IT needs, the reported distribution of IT costs in one of the communities sharing IT services was 90 percent being paid by the district and only 10 percent by the town.

Instances where IT services are shared between the town government and BOE include: Darien; East Hartford; Madison; Mansfield; Newtown; and Waterbury. For example, the town of Mansfield, the Mansfield BOE, and Regional District 19 share an IT department consisting of four full-time employees – an IT director, and three IT specialists – with the time and costs of the joint office being split as follows:

- Town pays 65%
- Mansfield BOE pays 20%
- Region 19 BOE pays 15%

This split does not reflect all IT work done at each entity. Each school district has additional IT staff who exclusively work for and are paid by the district, although such staff is supervised from the centralized IT department. This configuration requires the director of the centralized IT department to have appropriate CSDE certification to be able to supervise the staff who may work with students in each school district.

The town of Madison and the Madison school district have a similarly structured shared IT department. Three of five IT employees, including a director and assistant director, are paid for 50-50 by the town and BOE. Two IT employees work exclusively in the schools, and their salaries and benefits are paid fully by the school district.

Even in districts where there is no formal sharing of IT personnel, it was reported to PRI that town and district IT personnel frequently consulted, cooperated, or collaborated with each other for various reasons. One example of this is the above mentioned situation where both district and town IT staff were involved in the installation and setup of a joint telephone system. Such collaboration may also occur in relation to troubleshooting hardware issues or software packages that are used by government offices as well as the school district. Although a superintendent occasionally mentioned that provision of services to, or receipt of services from, a town would be recorded as in-kind services, in the vast majority of situations it was reported that such cooperation was undocumented and informal.

Additional areas somewhat related to IT personnel where there was evidence of cooperation between municipalities and districts, or RESCs and districts, were website maintenance and end user training. In connection with end user training for use of technology, which could include use of either finance or administrative software or educational software, districts cooperated at times with other districts directly, as well as with RESCs and their municipal governments.

Software. Schools use a variety of software systems, both for administration/operations and for student instruction. Administrative and operational software packages can include those for: financial management; human resources management; student information systems; messaging; student testing; conducting surveys; building management; and power management. Educational software can include platforms for distribution of content and student submission of assignments, as well as on-line learning software.

The following subsections will address: 1) financial management software, 2) student information systems, 3) messaging software, and 4) educational software. In relation to financial management software, almost all cooperation is between BOEs and municipalities, while in relation to student information systems, messaging software, and educational software the cooperative efforts tend to be facilitated by RESCs but involve multiple districts taking advantage of RESC negotiated contracts to access software packages. An IT manager at EASTCONN, for example, estimated that close to two-thirds of the districts in the EASTCONN catchment area participated in one or more software licenses that had been negotiated by the RESC for use by its catchment area districts.

Financial management software. As shown previously in Table 5-2, one-half of all districts surveyed by PRI staff indicated that they shared financial management software with their municipalities. This sharing occurred regardless of district size, DRG, and RESC catchment area. Such arrangements often arose, however, in situations where the district's central office was located on the same site or very close to the town's government offices. Benefits to sharing the same financial management software include: ease in budget preparation, the ability to jointly bring in training or technical assistance and share knowledge between district staff and town staff, and, to a limited degree, saving money by not running two different packages.

The sharing of financial management software between a district and municipality was not without challenges. A few interviewees noted that various municipal finance office software packages, having been designed specifically for municipal financial management and then subsequently modified for use by school districts later on, were not as well suited to school finance office needs and might require customization or modification to be jointly used by both entities.

Some superintendents noted there were plans to eventually get the BOE and town on the same financial management platform, but depending on how recently either the town or the BOE had last upgraded software, this could be a long-term goal. For either a town or BOE to switch to a new financial management system necessarily requires not only investment in software, but also a transition process, entry of historical data into the new software system, and training of employees. A number of school superintendents reported shared finance office operations, but expressed concern that this process could not be rushed. Both district and town administrators who had transitioned, or were considering a transition, to shared financial management software noted that the benefits are likely to be the efficiencies related to joint operations rather than significant monetary savings.

Student Information System (SIS) software. Many superintendents and other administrators mentioned the need to submit large amounts of data to CSDE. In order to facilitate this process, all but the smallest schools and school districts maintain a student information system (SIS). A SIS typically allows on-line access to student records by teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Access to student records allows for the monitoring of schedules, grades, attendance, work completion, and progress toward graduation. A district may use its SIS not only to aggregate data into specific reports and spreadsheets required for submission to CSDE, but also to integrate with other software for sending phone, text, or email messages, or managing student financial accounts for the school store or the school lunch program.

PRI staff heard from several sources that as many as 60 or 70 percent of Connecticut's school districts are using the same SIS software – a program called PowerSchool. Districts typically purchase their licenses for this software directly from its manufacturer, but may not have capacity to maintain the software on their own servers. For an added fee paid directly to the vendor or a third-party, a district can also obtain hosting services, which involves the hosting entity maintaining the software on its own servers on behalf of a district. The hosting fee typically varies based on the number of students in a district. Through CREC, the RESC Alliance provides PowerSchool hosting services to all interested districts. This allows a district that either cannot or does not want to maintain the PowerSchool software on its own server to pay the same fee negotiated by CREC for hosting services regardless of the district's size. CREC reports that for some districts the cooperative hosting agreement can result in a savings of $2.00 per student.

At least three different RESCs – ACES, CREC, and EASTCONN – host user groups that can be attended by district staff and also provide various consulting services to facilitate and assist them in the use of PowerSchool. In addition to attending user groups or paying for consulting services, school administrators report that it is a very common practice for an IT director or PowerSchool user in one district to pick up the phone and call a peer in another district for assistance with a particular difficulty. The relationships that invite such informal

cooperation or collaboration may be outgrowths of a RESC-based user group, relationships formed through CAPSS, CASBO, or some other professional advocacy organization, or having former relationships through prior places of employment.

Messaging software. School messaging software is a kind of software that can allow contacts to student, parents, and potentially other entities with information about: holidays and vacations; weather closings, delays, or early dismissals; student absences; and upcoming events and deadlines. Such messaging software can make automated phone calls to deliver recorded messages, send texts, and send emails. The contact numbers and email addresses are likely to be accessed through the messaging software's interface with a school's SIS, which is the central repository for student and parent contact information.

The most frequently used messaging software package seems to be SchoolMessenger, and two of Connecticut's RESCs – ACES and CREC – negotiated a licensing contract with a SchoolMessenger vendor to make this software available to any Connecticut district at a competitive rate that also becomes lower as more districts join the contract. Like much educational software, the per-student cost to a school district is related to size, with a larger school district being able to pay a lower per-student fee while smaller districts pay a higher per-student fee. RESC personnel involved in negotiating a statewide contract with the SchoolMessenger vendor noted that few big school districts are interested in, or stand to benefit from, the RESC contract. Small districts, however, are apt to find that it results in savings opportunities. Information on School Messenger savings were unavailable.

Educational software. As noted earlier, EASTCONN, whose member districts are almost all under 2,000 students, reports that about two-thirds of its member districts participate in joint licensing of one or more kinds of software that are normally sold to districts on a fee-per-student basis. No other RESC quantified the frequency with which member districts took advantage of joint software licensing. Several other RESCs did report negotiating similar RESC-wide rates for programs such as BlackBoard and Schoology – learning management platforms allowing teachers to make educational content available to students on-line – or Virtual High School and other on-line learning and credit recovery software programs. Other kinds of software that RESCs reported jointly licensing on behalf of member districts included student testing software and school climate survey software.

Sometimes a RESC determines the number of districts interested in a joint license, has those districts contractually commit to using the license, and then licenses the software on behalf of all interested districts. In such situations the RESC receives a single bill from the vendor, and charges each individual district *pro rata* based on its contractual commitment. At other times, a RESC may not need districts to pre-commit before a jointly beneficial price can be negotiated, and districts can simply access the negotiated price by contacting the vendor and identifying as a RESC associated district, as is the case with SchoolMessenger and with PowerSchool hosting.

Large districts typically have bargaining power sufficient to ensure competitively low rates, and may have little to gain by participating in joint licensing of educational and other school software packages. Savings related to educational software licensing are likely to be relatively modest in relation to total school budgets – a $2.00 per student savings, as CREC reported for PowerSchool hosting, reflects a savings of less than $2,000 for a district with fewer

than 1,000 student. Nevertheless it represents savings that can be directed to other educational purposes.

Shared Business Operations and Human Resources

Many Connecticut districts have some shared back office staff performing functions related to managing finances and human resources. Outside of regional school districts sharing centralized administration with their associated local districts, most sharing of such operational staff is with the municipality in which the district is located rather than with another school district or RESC. Because a few districts do share back office staff with another district or RESC, these arrangements will be discussed at the outset of this section, followed by an overview of the more common cooperative efforts to share back office staff between BOEs and municipalities.

District-to-district or district-to-RESC shared business or HR manager. Rather than sharing a business manager through a district-to-district agreement, the Wolcott BOE approved and agreed to the Thomaston BOE hiring the Wolcott business manager to work one day a week. This employee serves the Thomaston BOE primarily in a consulting role, advising the administrator who, in addition to other district duties, also performs the routine day-to-day functions of a school business official.

EASTCONN has arrangements with a few small, single-school districts in eastern Connecticut to provide business management and human resources management. These small districts have few administrative staff and decided to contract for business management and/or human resources support from the RESC rather than hire a part-time business manager or share a finance or human resources manager or department with the municipality.

Benefits and challenges to BOE sharing business or HR management with another district or RESC. The situations described above appear to uniquely meet the needs of small districts. Each of the districts involved in receiving back office services from another district or RESC has a total enrollment of fewer than 1,000 students. In Thomaston, for example, the contract to receive part-time services from another district's business manager appears to have arisen as a result of proximity, relationships between district administrations, and the capacity and flexibility of current administrative personnel.

According to individuals at EASTCONN and other RESCs, it is apparent that if a RESC has capacity to provide various forms of operational support – whether business management support, HR support, or IT support – it is often more cost effective for a very small or small school district to contract with the RESC for such services rather than to obtain the services from a private vendor.

Shared BOE-municipal back office operations. While the focus of this study was regional cooperation between school districts, RESCs, and other educational entities, many school districts share certain back office functions with municipalities. As shown earlier in Table 5-1, it is far more common for a district to share operational staff with a municipal government than with another BOE or RESC in areas such as financial management and human resources.

Table 5-3: Districts sharing specific back office functions with municipality

Function	Number of Districts
Accounting/auditing	41
Payroll	9
Personnel records	1
Recruitment/hiring	5

Source: PRI Superintendent Survey

Table 5-3 identifies some of the specific back office areas in which district-municipal cooperation occurs. Services that may be shared or functions that may be under the management of a single joint director or office include: accounting and/or auditing; payroll processing; maintenance of personnel files; and recruitment and hiring. On the one hand, cooperation between BOEs and municipalities for back office operations could be viewed as a barrier to districts cooperating with each other or with the local RESC. Conversely, it could be viewed as a beneficial arrangement.

It appears, based on a constellation of publically available information including: a review of MORE Commission working group testimony; attendance at CCM's Annual Convention; and interviews with various individuals associated with both boards of education and municipalities, that the following entities have some level of shared financial services:

- Colchester BOE and Town of Colchester;
- Columbia BOE and Town of Columbia;
- East Hampton BOE and Town of East Hampton;
- Mansfield BOE, RSD 19, and Town of Mansfield;
- Madison BOE and Town of Madison; and
- Plainville BOE and Town of Plainville.

These entities vary by size, ranging from Columbia, with fewer than 500 students, to Madison, with over 3,000 students. This suggests that opportunity to realize efficiencies through sharing back office functions is not limited to small districts and towns. Instead, the sharing of such services appears to be a function of the relationship between a district and a municipality.

In addition to asking superintendents whether districts had a shared finance director or business manager, they were also asked specifically about:

- accounting/auditing – where the majority of districts shared services with their municipalities;
- payroll – where only nine districts did so; and
- personnel records management – where only one district did so.

Because the focus of this study was on cooperation between boards of education, a discussion of the benefits and challenges related to districts sharing back office functions with municipalities can be found in Appendix G.

Cooperation involving recruitment and hiring. Unlike many other back office functions, other districts and RESCs, rather than municipalities, appear to be the cooperative partners of choice for staff recruitment and hiring. Only four districts (7 percent) reported collaborating around recruitment with other school districts. Seven districts (13 percent) reported

cooperating with RESCs for staff recruitment. Five districts (9 percent) reported cooperating with a municipality relative to staff recruitment. Cooperative activities with municipalities included management of the posting and application process, and recruitment of either shared or non-instructional employees (e.g., secretaries and custodians). In contrast, the cooperative recruitment involving other BOEs or RESCs included joint job fairs and recruitment of candidates for certified positions, including superintendents, providers of related services for students receiving special education, and substitute teachers.

Cooperation involving fingerprinting. An essential part of the hiring process for any individual who will be employed by a school district and working in a school building is conducting criminal and child protective services background checks.[54] The criminal background check involves collection of the candidate's fingerprints, which are then forwarded to the State Police Bureau of Identification for comparison to those contained in state and national criminal history databases.

Each Connecticut RESC is required to offer fingerprinting services to districts within their catchment area.[55] Districts also have options of collecting fingerprints and submitting them to the State Police Bureau of Investigation directly or relying upon local police departments for fingerprinting services. Based on PRI superintendent interviews, the majority of districts (55 percent) reported relying upon local police departments for the fingerprinting of new employees. About one-third of districts (34 percent) used the fingerprinting services offered by RESCs.

Districts that used RESCs for at least some of their fingerprinting of new hires included 91 percent of the districts in the EASTCONN catchment area, 63 percent of the districts in the LEARN catchment area, and 27 percent of the districts in the CREC catchment area. Across size categories, 71 percent of districts enrolling fewer than 2,000 students utilized RESCs for fingerprinting new hires, but only 20 percent of those districts enrolling between 2,000 and 7,200 students, and only 11 percent of those districts enrolling over 8,000 students did so. Consistent with what PRI staff learned in interviews with RESC staff, it appears that it is primarily small rural districts – where there might not be local law enforcement agencies – that routinely used RESCs to fingerprint new hires. Larger districts may have the capacity to conduct fingerprinting in-house and/or have a local law enforcement agency that new employees could easily access.

Only one district reported cooperation with another district to fingerprint new hires, although PRI staff heard anecdotally that a few other districts may do this as well.

Shared Facilities Management

There was no sharing of facilities management or facilities maintenance and oversight between BOEs and other BOEs or RESCs. Thus, the discussion in this section is limited to existing cooperative efforts involving BOEs and municipalities and the benefits and challenges to such arrangements. As will be discussed below, a municipality is perhaps a better partner than another school district when it comes to maintaining a school district's property and buildings.

[54] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-221d.
[55] See C.G.S. Sec. 10-221d (b).

Sharing of facilities maintenance staff. No district reported sharing any building or grounds staff with another school district or RESC in response to either the PRI superintendent survey or the CASBO shared service survey. Instead, both surveys revealed a high level of cooperation between local school districts and municipalities, and such cooperation occasionally included the sharing of a single facility director for both town and school property. What was very common, however, was for town personnel to have direct responsibility for various aspects of school grounds maintenance, particularly in relation to parking lots and athletic fields.

Shared facilities director. Neither the PRI superintendent survey nor the CASBO shared services survey specifically asked whether a district shared a facilities director with a municipality, so the frequency with which this happens cannot be specified or estimated. Nevertheless, four superintendents surveyed by PRI staff volunteered that there was a shared facilities management position between their BOE and town. Of these four districts, one is very small (fewer than 1,000 students), two are mid-sized (between 2,000 and 4,000 students), and one is large (8,000 to 12,000 students). In addition, the town of Mansfield and the Mansfield BOE are known to have a shared facilities maintenance department with a single director, and the town of Plainville reports that it is considering a shared facilities department under the direction of a shared facilities director.

What is much more common than a unified town-BOE facilities department with a single director is for municipal staff to be responsible for some aspects of either building or grounds maintenance at school property. Town staff preforming functions for the BOE, or BOE staff performing functions for the town, may take many different forms. One example would be when BOE custodial staff may also have responsibility to clean a building occupied by town government. This often, but not exclusively, occurs when a BOE and town government have offices in the same building. Similarly, the town, but not the BOE, may employ various kinds of grounds maintenance staff – such as those who mow fields or plow parking lots – and those town staff may perform those functions at property occupied by the BOE. In situations where each entity has its own custodial staff, the BOE, but not the town, may employ an electrician, plumber, or other specialized maintenance staff. When the town has a need for such services, the BOE employee may then perform the work for the town.

Shared security. Half the superintendents reported their districts cooperated with local law enforcement agencies in connection with school security. This shared security often takes the form of a school district entering into an agreement with the police department or constabulary for one or more police officers to serve as school resource officers (SROs). The district typically reimburses the town for some or all SRO salary and benefits in exchange for the SRO having primary responsibility for maintaining a presence in the local schools, conducting programs for students, and maintaining relationships with administration, teachers, students, and the broader school community. The SRO remains a full member of the local law enforcement agency, however, and may be called away from his or her duties during school hours to tend to a local law enforcement situation that requires his or her response.

Over the years, there have been concerns about students being arrested for school-based misconduct and the appropriate role for SROs in relation to managing student behavior. Public Act 15-168, effective July 1, 2015, requires each school district that has a collaboration with local law enforcement for the provision of one or more SROs to enter into a memorandum of

understanding regarding the role and responsibility of the school resource officer. At the time PRI staff was conducting interviews, most superintendents reported they were in the process of drafting such MOUs.

Recommendations Related to Shared Administrative and Back Office Functions

The PRI committee finds that some school districts in Connecticut can and do realize efficiencies through sharing food service directors and food service operations. Personnel in most districts are aware that sharing a food service director is possible, but personnel in many districts reported they did not believe it was possible to have fully shared food service operations. Therefore, the **PRI committee recommends that:**

5. **CSDE should disseminate information to school districts about the possibility of realizing efficiencies through either sharing food service directors or sharing food service operations. Such dissemination efforts could potentially be supported by CASBO, CAPSS, and the six RESCs.**

The PRI committee also finds that although there are several RESC based opportunities for district to cooperatively participating in software licensing and/or hosting arrangements, there is no centralized listing of what opportunities exist and whether they are available statewide or only within individual RESC catchment areas. Therefore, the **PRI committee recommends that:**

6. **The RESC Alliance should develop a centralized listing of all available opportunities for districts to obtain reduced rates for software licensing or hosting and that each RESC include links to this list on their websites to facilitate district access to such opportunities.**

The PRI committee finds that a board of education sharing administrative, back office, or facilities personnel and services with another BOE, RESC, or municipality may be beneficial in some but not all situations.

The PRI committee also finds that many Connecticut RESCs are capable of providing various administrative and operational support services to local districts in lieu of those districts having to employ their own staff, share administrative or operational staff with another district, share administrative or operational staff with a municipality, or secure services from a private vendor or contractor, and can often do so at fair and cost-effective rates

Chapter 6

Cooperative Purchasing

Cooperative purchasing can encompass many different goods and services, and school districts may cooperate with many different partners. A district, for example, may purchase cooperatively with a group of other districts that is affiliated formally or informally, or affiliated with a RESC or other regional entity. A district may also engage in purchasing through or in cooperation with a municipal government. In some instances, the joint BOE-municipality unit may participate in a larger formal or informal group. Many districts have different partners for different items that are cooperatively purchased. Some districts report not participating in cooperative purchasing with other BOEs, municipalities, or regional entities because they are pursuing opportunities through the state Department of Administrative Services (DAS) or through national purchasing cooperatives. Table 6-1 lists items often purchased cooperatively and the entities with which districts report cooperating.

Table 6-1: District Partners for Cooperative Purchasing

Education/Office Supplies	Petroleum Products	Health Insurances
RESC	Town	Town
Independent Consortium	Independent Consortium	RESC
State	RESC	Independent Consortium
Other District	Council of Governments	State

Source: PRI staff synthesis of interview and survey data.

This chapter will be structured around the three broad areas of: tangible items; insurance; and job order contracting. Within each broad area there will be a section describing what cooperation is occurring involving Connecticut boards of education, RESCs, and municipalities along with the apparent frequency of such efforts. Where appropriate, each section will mention other cooperative purchasing opportunities beyond BOEs, RESCs, and municipalities. The final sections of the chapter will summarize benefits and challenges to the three broad areas for cooperative purchasing and outline PRI findings related to cooperative purchasing. Information presented in this chapter is based on the 56 structured superintendent interviews conducted by PRI staff, additional superintendent and administrator interviews at regional and other school districts, interviews with RESC personnel, and interviews and data received from other sources, including various cooperative purchasing group organizers and the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO). When information is given about a percentage of superintendents or districts, this refers solely to data collected from the 56 structured superintendent interviews.

Tangible Items

Districts may cooperatively purchase almost any products that are regularly used and consumed within the school environment for both instructional and non-instructional purposes. Instructional supplies that may be cooperatively purchased range from paper, pens, and pencils;

to food, cafeteria, and custodial supplies; to heating oil, electricity, and vehicle fuel. Generally speaking, most Connecticut districts are involved in one or more forms of cooperative purchasing with other school districts, either through RESCs or through informal multi-district purchasing cooperatives. One half (54 percent) of the superintendents participating in structured interviews specified that they participated in cooperative purchasing for some sort of tangible goods.

RESC based purchasing cooperatives. Table 6-2 provides an idea of the range of items that can be cooperatively purchased. Some of the categories of items are available to participants in the CREC hosted Connecticut Consortium for Cooperative Purchasing (CCCP), and others to those involved with EASTCONN's Cooperative Purchasing Program. These two RESC based purchasing cooperatives provide member districts with the ability to acquire goods at a price that is guaranteed to all participating districts for the length of the contract. The most significant difference between the ways the two cooperatives work is that the CREC cooperative requires purchase of an annual membership, whereas rather than buying a membership participants in EASTCONN's program commit to the purchase of a fixed percentage of their annual requirements from the contracts in which they participate. Table 6-3 shows the number of members in each of these cooperative purchasing programs for the 2015-16 school year and describes the basic terms of membership.

Table 6-2: Items Purchased Through RESC-Based Purchasing Groups

CREC – CCCP	EASTCONN
• School and office supplies • Art supplies • Health/nursing supplies • Audio-visual equipment	• Custodial and maintenance supplies • Food and cafeteria supplies • Copiers

Sources: EASTCONN Cooperative Purchasing Brochure on file at PRI Staff Office and interviews and correspondence with staff in CREC's Office for Regional Efficiencies.

Table 6-3: RESC Based Cooperative Purchasing Groups – Summary Information for 2015-16

	CREC	EASTCONN
Connecticut local and regional school district members	127	63
Other Connecticut members	28	7
Out of state school district members	7	1
Annual cost of membership	$100	$0
Annual sales	$7M	$3M

Source: PRI Staff Correspondence with CREC and EASTCONN staff.

As noted, members of the EASTCONN cooperative do not pay a membership fee, but must commit to participating in certain contracts and to buying 70 percent of their annual requirements from those contracts. By asking members to commit to a certain quantity of goods to be purchased, the EASTCONN cooperative purchasing program is more similar to the kind of independent purchasing cooperatives that have existed around the state for over two decades. According to DAS, a "true cooperative" is defined as existing when "two of more organizations

Example 6-A. Savings on Copy Paper

Copy machine paper is a product that almost every school district needs. Connecticut school districts have the ability to save money using either a state contract through the DAS contracting portal or through membership in the Connecticut Consortium for Cooperative Purchasing (CCCP) hosted by CREC.

- *Market Rate =$45.99[a] per case*
- *DAS Contract Rate= $29.40[b] per case*
- *CCCP Contract Rate = $24.21[c] per case*

A district purchasing 100 cases of paper would save $1,659 over the market rate by using the state contract or $2,178 using the CCCP contract. A district with membership in CCCP would be able to save $519 over the DAS contract rate.

Notes:
[a] Price obtained on-line at staples.com on October 26, 2015
[b] Price contained in DAS contract #12PSX0184 accessed on line at http://www.biznet.ct.gov/SCP_Search/ContractDetail.aspx?ID=12986 on October 26, 2015.
[c] Price provided through PRI staff correspondence with the Coordinator of Cooperative Services who administers the CCCP.

combine their requirements and solicit bids or offers of goods or services."[56] A vendor responding to a bid reflecting combined requirements is often able to provide a more competitive bid because of the size of the guaranteed minimum commitment. In other words, by jointly stating their requirements and seeking a single bid, the member districts realize economies of scale that would be unobtainable without acting cooperatively.

To illustrate the potential benefits of cooperative purchasing, Example 6-A describes the potential savings that can be realized through participation in the CCCP on as common an item as copy machine paper. Savings readily exceed the $100 membership fee.

Petroleum product purchasing cooperatives. Two thirds of school superintendents (64 percent) reported that they purchased heating oil with the municipality in which they were located. Some (20 percent) reported they purchased heating oil with another school district, RESC, or other entity. In many cases school districts are cooperating not only with other districts or the municipality but with both entities.

One of the longest standing cooperative purchasing groups in Connecticut was started over 20 years ago by two school business managers in the west central part of the state, Ed Arum and Robert Giesen.[57,58] This group assembles interested participants, mostly municipalities and boards of education, and solicits bids to meet the stated requirements of all participants. The bids districts most commonly mentioned participating in with The Arum Group were for petroleum products, although other goods and services for which the group has cooperatively bid include: electricity, copier services, and inventory/appraisal services.

School districts and municipalities typically estimate their requirements for petroleum products and lock in prices over a year in advance in preparation for the school district and municipal budget development process. The Arum Group recently finalized contracts for heating oil, diesel fuel, and gasoline for the 2016-17 school year. Over 60 different entities are

[56] Wilson, C. *State Procurement Marketplace BREIFING BOOK*: 2013 Year in Review. Department of Administrative Services Procurement Services (2014).
[57] Mr. Arum retired as business manager of Region 15 in 2005. Mr. Giesen is currently the business manager of Region 12.
[58] Participation in the group varies from year to year, and includes both school districts and municipalities. Participants typically refer to the group as "Ed Arum's Group" or "The Arum Group." Although information about participation is now available to districts through CREC's website,[58] The Arum Group remains independent and participation does not require membership in the CCCP.

participating in one or more of these bids, and over 35 of these entities were either a BOE or a joint municipality-BOE. Forty-eight entities specified requirements for heating oil, with some small BOEs stating requirements of 10,000-15,000 gallons while larger BOEs or town-BOE entities stating requirements of over 100,000 gallons. Example 6-B estimates the potential scope of savings for a small school district for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.

Example 6-B. Cooperative Purchase of Heating Oil with "The Arum Group"

Many school districts buy heating oil through purchasing cooperatives. The Arum Group purchasing cooperative reported the following prices per gallon for 2013-14 and 2014-15:

Year (Savings)	Average Retail Price	Consortium Price
2013-14 (.666/gal)	3.846/gal	3.18/gal
2014-15 (.058/gal)	3.228/gal	3.17/gal

A small district, purchasing only 20,000 gallons annually, would have saved $13,320 in 2013-14.

Food service supplies purchasing cooperatives. Only seven percent of superintendents reported cooperative food or cafeteria supply purchasing with another district or RESC. PRI identified two groups in two parts of the state who described the efficiencies this afforded: the EASTCONN purchasing cooperative and the Central Connecticut Cooperative.

This Central Connecticut Cooperative consists exclusively of school district food service directors who have been purchasing food and food service products together for at least 20 years. The Central Connecticut Cooperative does not have a formal legal existence and its membership has changed through the years. Entering the 2015-16 school year the membership is reported to include: Berlin, Cheshire, New Milford, Region 16, Seymour, Watertown, Wolcott, Regions 14 and 15 (who share a food service director), and Region 10, Avon and Canton (who also share a single food service director). The nine food service directors work together to develop a single bid list for products that meet federal school nutrition program guidelines. A vendor must agree to deliver products to each site required by each district, and thus may be required to deliver to a smaller district or a more rural location than it would normally serve. The cooperative food bidding allows each district to realize economies of scale. Also, as one food service director explained, vendors will provide good customer service to keep each member happy, as one unhappy member could lead the whole group to seek a new vendor in future years.

Other cooperative purchasing opportunities. In addition to membership in a RESC based or informal cooperative purchasing group, Connecticut school districts have other cooperative purchasing opportunities through "piggybacking," particularly piggybacking on state bids available through the Department of Administrative Services, and membership or participation in national purchasing cooperatives. Although these are not technically models of cooperation between boards of education, they play an important role in allowing districts to purchase cooperatively in the absence of partnerships with other BOE's or RESCs. Each of these models will be briefly described.

State bids and opportunities through the Department of Administrative Services. One alternative to regional cooperative purchasing is for school districts to utilize state bids. The Procurement Division of the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS) negotiates and executes most contracts for goods and services needed by all Connecticut

executive branch agencies. The majority of these contracts are negotiated in such a way that political subdivisions of the state, including both municipalities and school districts, may take advantage of them.[59,60]

Over one-third of superintendents (37 percent) reported that their districts took advantage of state bids. District size and RESC catchment area was not a factor in use of state bids. Often the state bid list was one or several sources districts consulted in searching for the best price for certain items. The earlier example 6-A demonstrated cost savings associated with state bids as compared to retail price for copy machine paper, although in that specific example the state bid was not the lowest possible price for districts that were also members of the CCCP.

"*Piggybacking*." School districts in Connecticut have opportunities to "piggyback" on contracts that have been negotiated by other BOEs, RESCs, DAS, or, at times, other entities. In order for piggybacking to occur, the entity entering into a contract will ask a vendor whether it will allow other school districts, municipalities, or non-profit entities to take advantage of the bid on the same terms. Many contracts negotiated on behalf of the state of Connecticut by DAS allow piggybacking by municipalities. PRI staff was told about a contract negotiated by Region 12 for power management software that will be matched by the vendor for any other Connecticut school district.[61] The CREC website specifically explains how districts can solicit bids in a way that allows the vendor to specify they will provide the same pricing to other Connecticut municipalities and boards of education. The website page also contains links to two contracts with local Connecticut school districts that specifically allow piggybacking by other boards of education for band instruments and school uniforms.[62]

National purchasing cooperatives. Many affiliated with organizations that provide support services to Connecticut school districts and municipalities (e.g., CCM, CRCOG, CASBO) indicated their organization provides a gateway for districts to participate in national and regional purchasing cooperatives. These cooperatives may require membership in a gateway organization, involve payment of a small fee, or be totally free.

Through both superintendent and other interviews, it became apparent that Connecticut school districts, regardless of size, are often aware of the multiple cooperative purchasing opportunities and may compare prices before making a final decision about where to purchase certain items. One school administrator explained that he will check the state bid list, then the

[59] A broad overview of DAS services, including state contracts, available free of charge to Connecticut's municipalities and school districts can be found at: http://das.ct.gov/cr1.aspx?page=106.

[60] As noted in relation to petroleum purchasing cooperatives, school districts and municipalities are also able to participate in joint bids through DAS. DAS relies upon informal networks and partnerships with CRCOG and with the Public Purchasing Association of Connecticut (PPAC) to notify municipalities and school districts of when a particular item is going to be cooperatively bid.

[61] In a kind of "piggybacking" arrangements, Hartford Public Schools negotiated a contract with Middlebury Interactive Languages for the development and perpetual licensing of an ELL program that it is also permitted to make available to any schools participating in the Commissioner's Network. Commissioner's Network Schools are up to 25 schools at a time that enter agreements with CSDE to secure school-level flexibility and autonomy for a period of three to five years in exchange for heightened accountability while implementing research based practices to dramatically improve student performance. See: http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2754&Q=334364 accessed on December 4, 2015.

[62] See http://www.crec.org/coop/piggyback.php accessed on October 27, 2015.

CREC price, and sometimes even one of the national or regional purchasing cooperatives, before he sees what his own vendors can provide. At times, his own vendors can meet or beat the cooperative purchasing prices.

Insurance

Escalating insurance costs, particularly for employee health insurance, have been of long-standing concern to almost all employers, including boards of education, for most of the past two decades. There are examples of Connecticut school districts working with other districts, RESCs, and municipalities to realize cost savings in obtaining employee health coverage, pharmacy benefits, dental insurance, and medical stop loss coverage. The procurement of other insurance, including workers compensation insurance and liability-auto-property insurance, is another area in which school districts have sought cost efficiencies through cooperation, often with the municipalities in which school districts are located.

Employee health insurance. There are several mechanisms through which boards of education can collaborate around health insurance. In order to determine what kinds of cooperation were occurring and with what frequency, PRI staff interviewed both school district and town administrators responsible for the establishment and management of employee health plans, and representatives of Connecticut RESCs. CASBO's shared services survey results, discussed in Appendix E, provided additional information about the frequency of health insurance cooperation as well as some specific examples of how this occurs between boards of education and municipalities.

Over half of superintendents (55 percent) reported they cooperated with a municipality in obtaining employee health insurance. It was apparent from information provided by superintendents and other stakeholders that there are many different approaches to collaborating on employee health insurance. In some districts school board employees might be considered sub-groups of the municipality (e.g., town police, firefighters, or custodians) for purposes of insurance coverage, while in others all employees of a municipality and school district may comprise a single pool.

RESC based health insurance cooperatives. Only one superintendent indicated his district cooperated with another district to arrange employee health insurance, and an additional four superintendents (7 percent) indicated that their districts cooperated with a RESC. These districts were primarily in the very small and small size categories and located in the EASTCONN and LEARN catchment areas. Through interviews, PRI staff learned that two of the six RESCS – EASTCONN and LEARN – have formed health insurance cooperatives through which all member entities obtain one or more types of health insurance coverage on a self-insured basis. Seven BOEs, representing 4 percent of all local and regional school districts, are involved in these efforts. Table 6-4 provides some basic information about the Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Cooperative (ECHIP – organized in conjunction with EASTCONN) and the Eastern Connecticut Health and Medical Cooperative (ECHMC – organized in conjunction with LEARN). It should be noted that both cooperatives include municipalities as well as BOE members. In each cooperative, the hosting RESC is not only a member, but also provides the administration of the cooperative. Example 6-C illustrates some of the reported savings realized by districts participating in these cooperatives.

Table 6-4: RESC Hosted Employee Health Insurance Cooperatives Summary Information (2015-16)

	ECHIP	ECHMC
Host/Member RESC	EASTCONN	LEARN
Number of Members Entities 2015-16	9	5
Total Employees Covered	1,520	860
Range of Covered Employees at Member Entities	Approx.: 160-370	Approx.: 70-350
Members 2015-16	• Town of Coventry • Coventry BOE • EASTCONN • Town of Plainfield • Plainfield BOE • Town of Putnam • Putnam BOE • Town of Tolland • Tolland BOE	• Town of Clinton • Clinton BOE • LEARN • North Stonington BOE • Old Saybrook BOE
Products 2015-16	• Health Insurance • Stop loss • Joint Wellness Committee	• Dental Insurance • Pharmacy Plan

Sources: PRI staff correspondence with LEARN and EASTCONN staff.

EDUCATION CONNECTION also recently reported that it is exploring the creation of a cooperative to provide health insurance coverages similar to those provided by LEARN and/or EASTCONN. Similarly, CREC is exploring the creation of a cooperative stop loss captive, and approximately 18 entities, including both BOEs and municipalities, have expressed preliminary interest in participating in this cooperative.

Although the RESC-related health insurance cooperatives came into existence following the enactment of C.G.S. Sec. 7-464b (P.A. 10-174), which specifically allowed any municipality or local or regional board of education to enter into a written agreement to be treated as a single entity for the purpose of providing employee medical or health care benefits, PRI learned of two situations where groups involving municipalities and school districts had formed health insurance cooperatives prior to 2010. Since 1997, for example, the towns and BOEs of Andover, Hebron, and Marlborough, along with RSD 8, which is the regional high school district created by these three towns, have been parties to a written Related Group Rating Agreement. This agreement provides that the seven member entities be treated as a single pool for purposes of determining risk and setting employee health insurance coverage rates.[63]

[63] More information about this Related Group Rating Agreement can be found in Appendix A of the 2015 CASBO Shared Services White Paper. CASBO's shared services survey results are further discussed in Appendix E of this report.

Example 6-C. Cost Savings through Cooperative Activities Related to Employee Health Benefits

Although no district volunteered to share specific financial information with PRI, several offered generalized statements of cost savings that had been realized through the cooperative employee health insurance related activities outlined in this chapter.

ECHIP: Members of this cooperative report that:

- in 2014-15, renewal rates ranged from -2 percent to an average high of 8 percent; and
- for 2015-16, renewal rates reflect a 2.7% overall increase.

CTPSPC: Members of the coalition report collectively that:

- a recently negotiated pharmacy benefit manager renewal resulted in three million dollars in savings in the first year;
- twelve public sector entities collectively saw their life insurance costs reduced by over one million dollars over a three year period; and
- six public sector entities saw a collective $500,000 reduction in dental insurance in 2007.

Connecticut Public Sector Purchasing Coalition. PRI also learned that in 2003, a mixed group of municipalities and boards of education, through their personnel managers and insurance consultants, sought innovative strategies to control benefit costs for public sector employers through economies of scale, but without sacrificing independence or flexibility. As a result, the Connecticut Public Sector Purchasing Coalition (CTPSPC) was created, and has, over the past 12 years, assessed needs, researched products, and sought bids for a variety of employee benefits including pharmacy benefits, dental insurance, and life insurance.

Each CTPSPC participant determines which products to purchase and there is no commitment beyond the life of the contract with the vendor. The member list provided to PRI is reproduced in Table 6-5. Not all entities participate in each CTPSPC-negotiated benefit or insurance plan. There is no formal written arrangement among these 29 entities. The consultants involved in preparing the invitation to bid and analyze the responses, are compensated proportionally by the entities that choose to participate in the contract. Once a bid has been selected, each district or municipality enters into its own contract with the vendor. At the end of each contract, each district or municipality is free to either participate in the next bid or seek coverage elsewhere. The CTPSPC also provides a forum for participants to share best practices and experiences and the coalition also continues to explore potential expansion into other employee wellness programs and ancillary benefits.

Table 6-5: Membership in Connecticut Public Sector Purchasing Coalition

Municipal Members	Board of Education Members
---	Bethel Board of Education
Town of East Hartford	---
Town of Farmington	Farmington Public Schools
Town of Manchester	Manchester Public Schools
Town of New Milford	New Milford Board of Education
Town of Windsor	---
City of Bridgeport	Bridgeport Board of Education
City of Bristol	Bristol Board of Education
City of Danbury	Danbury Board of Education
City of Meriden	Meriden Board of Education
City of Middletown	Middletown Board of Education
City of New London	New London Board of Education
City of Norwalk	Norwalk Board of Education
City of Stamford	Stamford Board of Education
City of Waterbury	Waterbury Board of Education
City of West Haven	West Haven Board of Education

Connecticut Partnership Plan. Another alternative to regional cooperation for employee health insurance is the Connecticut

Partnership Plan. In four districts (7 percent) superintendents indicated they were using this mechanism to obtain employee health insurance coverage. The Connecticut Partnership Plan has been available to non-state public employee groups since 2011 for health, dental, and vision benefits, and since 2010 for pharmacy benefits.

Prior to 2015, the Connecticut Partnership Plan allowed an employee group associated with a non-state public employer to access the same coverage available to state employees, albeit at a rate adjusted to reflect the individual employee group's experience and projected claims. Through Public Act 15-93, non-state public employee groups can now join the state employee health plan pool and obtain coverage at the same rates available to state employees. Non-state public employee groups who had joined the Connecticut Partnership Plan prior to 2015 can apply to be part of the new plan, but may be subject to a penalty for early withdrawal.[64]

District administrators had mixed experiences in evaluating the benefits of participation in the Connecticut Partnership Plan prior to the statutory changes in 2015. Some interviewees told PRI staff that BOE staff had accessed the plan at significant savings over prior health insurance costs, while others reported that although they had considered the plan they found that the district could do as well or better by bidding and purchasing its own plan. A number of district administrators and union personnel representing BOE employees expressed great interest in seeing whether the Connecticut Partnership Plan becomes a feasible cost-saving option for more school districts.

Workers compensation and other insurance. School districts need to obtain many other forms of insurance, including worker's compensation insurance and liability-auto-property insurance. No superintendent interviewed or respondent to the CASBO survey indicated sharing any of these kinds of insurance with another school district or RESC. However, well over half of all superintendents participating in structured interviews reported that they shared premises liability insurance (64 percent) or other forms of insurance (59 percent) with their municipality.

In many instances municipal and BOE entities obtain workers compensation, property-liability-auto and other insurances through the Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA). CIRMA is a member owned and operated cooperative that exists for the purpose of assisting member entities in risk management. CIRMA members are the public entities that it insures. In addition to offering workers compensation and liability-auto-property insurance, CIRMA offers directors and officers insurance, school leader liability insurance, employment practices liability insurance, and various forms of student insurance, such as accident insurance for students traveling abroad. CIRMA staff reports that of its 219 workers compensation policies, 94 (42 percent) are written with a municipality and board of education combined on the same policy. Of CIRMA's 157 liability-auto-property policies, almost two-thirds (63 percent) are for a combined municipality and board of education.

[64] Public Act 15-93 was implemented on October 1, 2015 and information is available on the Comptroller's website: http://www.osc.ct.gov/ctpartner/index.html.

Job Order Contracting

Job order contracting (JOC) is another cooperative procurement mechanism that can be employed by school districts, although it is a relatively new practice in the state of Connecticut. Generally speaking, JOC provides a standardized approach to routine construction projects. Vendors bid to provide, over a specified contract period, an indefinite number of projects with fixed prices for certain materials (lumber, asphalt, sod) and tasks (replacing windows, installing carpeting, painting) and a pre-determined multiplier that will be applied to the fixed unit prices to account for the contractor's overhead and profit. When a particular building owner or manager is ready to initiate a project covered by the contract award, there is no need to initiate an RFP and bidding process. Instead the building owner or manager contacts the contractor to discuss the job, and the contractor then prepares a price proposal based on the pre-set prices for tasks and materials, and applying the pre-set multiplier. Once the building manager or owner has reviewed and approved the price proposal, work can begin immediately.

The incentive for vendors to enter JOC bids is that there is normally a guaranteed minimum amount of work and it streamlines their own bid development process. Vendors are motivated to complete work in a timely and satisfactory way so that they will be chosen for additional projects above the guaranteed minimum during the life of the contract. The advantages to the JOC process for entities engaged in construction, renovation, or repair projects is the elimination of the need to devote administrative time to the RFP and bidding process.

No superintendent made specific mention of using JOC, although most districts did report cooperation with the local municipality for building projects. Some municipalities have been using a JOC program called the Indefinite Quantity Construction Services Program, known by the acronym ezIQC, which is hosted by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG). CRCOG reports that since the inception of the ezIQC program in 2008 it has been used for projects at 14 local and regional school districts.

There are positive testimonials about JOC, particularly in that it allows routine renovations and repairs to be completed in a shorter amount of time with less administrative overhead and at a cost savings. Nevertheless, JOC is yet established as a best practice. Even advocates of JOC suggest it may not be appropriate for all new construction, and should be an available option rather than a required practice.

The entity in Connecticut that seems most interested in increased municipal and school district use of JOC is CRCOG. Although CRCOG membership is generally available to municipalities rather than boards of education, CRCOG emphasizes that if a school district is affiliated with a member municipality it is automatically eligible to participate in the services offered through the purchasing council. This includes not only a local board of education located in a CRCOG member town but also a regional school district that educates students from a town that is a CRCOG member town. Since there are 101 municipal members of CRCOG statewide, well over half of all Connecticut school districts could theoretically benefit from the ezIQC program.

Benefits and Barriers to Cooperative Purchasing Between Districts

Most local and regional school districts in Connecticut have been using various forms of cooperative purchasing for several decades. However, most superintendents, business managers, and other interviewees do not quantify cost savings associated with cooperative purchasing practices. The existence of savings through increased purchasing power is largely self-evident and opportunities to do so almost limitless. Moreover, once cooperative purchasing becomes the norm, as it is in many districts, there are no immediately visible savings. Districts are simply aware that they would face increased costs if cooperative purchasing efforts were discontinued.

While the benefits to cooperative purchasing are generally taken for granted, the barriers to cooperative purchasing are less obvious. In general, the barriers to cooperative purchasing revolve around political choices and to the vast array of available options other than cooperating with other districts and RESCS. It is assumed that districts that find it beneficial to purchase cooperatively with other districts and RESCs will do so, while districts that have better options through other arrangements, will gravitate toward those arrangements.

Tangible items. In some situations, local school district personnel reported they did not engage in cooperative purchasing other than working with the municipality due to charter requirements that most purchase contracts go out to bid or be conducted through a municipal purchasing department. However, it seems likely that municipal purchasing staff and departments, unless required to specifically put an item out to bid, are normally participating in one or more forms of cooperative purchasing on behalf of school districts.

Insurance. In connection with health related insurances, there are examples of cooperation between groups of school districts and municipalities. Although there are a few long-standing models of cooperation involving school districts to obtain employee health insurance, recent RESC-based activity – triggered by C.G.S. Sec. 7-464b – and new opportunities afforded by the Connecticut Partnership Plan are likely to result in more cooperative purchasing of health insurance.

In relation to other forms of insurance, there is also a high level of cooperation between school districts and municipalities, oftentimes facilitated by membership in CIRMA.

Job order contracting. The last area PRI explored in relation to cooperative purchasing was that of job order contracting, currently available to Connecticut school districts through the CRCOG ezIQC program. In the past seven years, work has been done in relation to projects in 14 local and one regional school district. More widespread use may not have occurred because there are concerns that cooperatively bid job order contracts may not meet all requirements for state funded school construction projects. For example, CREC cautions school districts using its gateway to national purchasing cooperatives that "it is CREC's understanding that the SDE does not recognize cooperative purchasing programs such as AEPA as a substitute for its bidding requirements."[65] Also, CRCOG reports there have been inconsistent determinations as to whether job order contracts through ezIQC meet various state agency bidding requirements.

[65] See: http://www.crec.org/coop/aepa.php.

Findings Related to Cooperative Purchasing

The PRI committee finds that although some cooperative purchasing occurs in collaboration with RESCs, the majority of cooperative purchasing by boards of education is either in partnership with, or includes, municipalities, or involves the use of state offered procurement options.

Chapter 7

Other Types of Educational Cooperation

In addition to examining regional cooperation in the six instructional and operational categories, PRI staff also gathered information about other mechanisms through which one or more school districts educate students from one or more towns or districts. The most frequent and visible form of educational regionalism is the formation of regional school districts. Also to be discussed are: agri-science centers; designated high schools; and cooperative arrangements pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Sec. 10-158a.[66] Each of these four types of cooperative efforts will be described, along with the benefits and challenges to each type of arrangement. The final section of the chapter will outline PRI findings relative to each of these four kinds of regional cooperative efforts.

Regional School Districts

Some of the key stakeholders interviewed by PRI staff suggested that small school districts should be consolidated into larger regional school districts in order to realize economies of scale and improve the diversity of educational offerings, particularly at the high school level. A few interviewees specifically mentioned that Vermont and Maine respectively had recently attempted to encourage (Vermont) and require (Maine) consolidation of small school districts into larger regional school districts.

PRI staff researched the history and current status of regional school districts in Connecticut and interviewed school administrators at seven of Connecticut's seventeen regional school districts and at two local school districts associated with regional school districts. PRI staff also spoke with municipal officials in two Connecticut towns that belong to regional school districts. A comprehensive description and discussion of regional school districts can be found in Appendix H. What follows is a summary description of Connecticut's existing regional school districts, followed by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages to regional school districts based on the experience of individuals directly involved in regional school districts and member communities.

Regional school districts are created when two or more towns agree to create a combined board of education that is responsible for providing the education of some or all of the students from each town involved. Regional school districts can be formed to serve any grade level or combination of grade levels. There are currently 17 regional school districts in the state. Most regional school districts involve two towns (8 districts) or three towns (7 districts), with the exception of Region 1 (6 towns) and Region 7 (4 towns). In total, 47 towns participate in the 17 regional school districts. Nine of the 17 regional school districts serve grades K-12, and are thus the only school district for each of its participating town. For the eight regional districts that are

[66] The Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) could also be described as a form of educational regionalism. Because the CTHSS is operated by the state and not by local school districts, it is not included in the scope of this study.

Table 6-1: Regional School Districts and Member Towns

RSD	Number of Towns	Member Towns	RSD Enrollment	Enrollment in Associated Districts
Grade K – 12 Regional School Districts				
Region 6	3	Goshen, Morris, Warren	995	N/A
Region 10*	2	Burlington, Harwinton	2,563	N/A
Region 12	3	Bridgewater, Roxbury, Washington	796	N/A
Region 13*	2	Durham, Middlefield	1,860	N/A
Region 14	2	Bethlehem, Woodbury	1,880	N/A
Region 15*	2	Middlebury, Southbury	3,967	N/A
Region 16*	2	Beacon Falls, Prospect	2,338	N/A
Region 17*	2	Haddam, Killingworth	2,264	N/A
Region 18*	2	Lyme , Old Lyme	1,406	N/A
Grade 7 – 12 Regional School Districts				
Region 4	3	Chester, Deep River, Essex	978	1,066
Region 5	3	Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge	2,330	2,393
Region 7	4	Barkhamsted, Colebrook, New Hartford, Norfolk	1,123	1,064
Region 8	3	Andover, Hebron, Marlborough	1,736	1,770
Region 11	3	Chaplin, Hampton, Scotland	287	428
Grade 9 – 12 Regional School Districts				
Region 1	6	Canaan, Cornwall, Kent, North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon	428	1,205
Region 9	2	Easton, Redding	1,065	2,016
Region 19	3	Ashford, Mansfield, Willington	1,194	2,124

Notes: * denotes the regional school districts that also provide preschool

Sources: PRI analysis of CSDE data. Enrollment data is for Fall 2013.

not K-12, there are also local districts that are responsible for the remaining grades. There are 27 towns that have both a local district and are part of a regional district. As of October 2013, there were over 27,000 students enrolled at regional school districts (five percent of students enrolled in public schools in Connecticut). There are another 12,000 students in the local districts associated with regional school districts, bringing total enrollment for towns involved with regional schools to 39,000 students (seven percent overall). Table 6-1 lists the regional school districts, along with their grade levels, the towns involved in the regional district board of education, and the number of students enrolled in the regional school district along with the number of students enrolled in any associated districts.

Recent activity relating to regional school districts. There have been no new regional school districts created since 1989, nor have any grades been added to or removed from a regional school district. There have, however, been efforts to do so, some as recently as 2015, the year of this report.

The most recent attempt at forming a regional school district involved the towns of Norfolk and Colebrook. Both towns, along with Barkhamstead and New Hartford, are involved in a four-town regional district for grades 7-12 (Region 7); what was under consideration in 2015 was forming a regional K-6 district for just these two towns. The issue went to referendum in each town in September 2015, and passed in Norfolk, which would have hosted the shared elementary school, but failed in Colebrook. As explained more fully in Appendix H, unless a referendum to form a regional school district passes in each involved town, the district is not created.

In several cases, towns have looked at expanding the grade levels of existing 9-12 or 7-12 regional school districts. Region 8 looked at adding grades in 1994 and 1998. Region 4 was exploring the possibility of expanding from serving grades 7-12 to serving grades K-12 as recently as this spring, before ceasing the effort this summer in the face of political resistance.

There have also been unsuccessful attempts to withdraw from or dissolve a regional school district. Region 11 has looked at dissolving several times, with the most recent (unsuccessful) vote in 2009. Region 11 has more recently been exploring other reorganization possibilities, such as becoming a K-12 district without a high school. Region 16 considered dissolution in the late 1990s before building a high school for the region in the early 2000s.

Advantages to regional school districts. The economic advantages to regional school districts are largely related to economies of scale based on student population. Instead of two, three, or even more towns having separate school districts with:

- superintendents,
- business offices,
- information technology departments and systems,
- food services programs,
- transportation programs, and
- special education departments,

multiple schools across two or more towns can share some or all of these functions. By doing so, it may also be possible to use fewer employees than might be necessary for each town with an independent district. For example a single full-time Spanish teacher may be able to work in the regional school district spending one-half day each in a middle school and a high school, whereas if each district had its own middle and high schools, each might employ a single full time Spanish teacher. Similarly, a single business officer may serve a regional school district whereas each of a number of small districts may assign business officer duties to other staff without specific business officer certification or employ part-time business managers.

By creating one larger school district out of two or more smaller ones, it sometimes becomes possible to offer educational and other opportunities that may not be feasible for a single small district. A high school with only 200 or 300 students, for example, may only offer one or two foreign languages. A high school with 1,000 students might be able to offer three or four different foreign language options. One single larger high school may also be able to field more sports teams, or offer a greater variety of extra-curricular activities than two or more small high schools could offer individually.

The benefits to a single larger district are not limited to the high school level. Smaller elementary schools may not be able to offer school lunch programs, after school services, full day kindergarten. or partial-day Pre-K. Some school administrators in small schools expressed concern that, with fewer than 100 students in an elementary school, there may be grade levels with only 3 or 4 students, requiring classes with combined grade levels. Even in slightly larger schools, there may be only one class at each grade level, which makes it impossible to separate students for social reasons (such as putting twins in separate classes at the same grade level) or when they have a learning style that does not work well with a particular teacher.

Barriers/challenges to forming regional school districts. Regional school districts are the most permanent type of cooperative efforts between towns. As noted above, no new regional school districts have been formed since 1989, nor have grades been added to or removed from existing districts. These facts underscore the many barriers to this form of educational regionalism. These barriers include: preference for one-town school districts; logistical challenges surrounding the details of regionalizing; and the difficulty in establishing on-going cost savings. These barriers are discussed in this chapter, and additional information about the procedural hurdles related to formation of regional school districts can be found in Appendix H.

Preference for local school districts. There are advantages to small schools including more individualized attention for students and a more supportive environment as teachers and administrators tend to get to know each other and each individual student quite well.[67] Small schools often feel and function like extended family or a very small tightly-knit and supportive community within a community. As a result, local municipalities may prefer to maintain their small local districts, as was demonstrated in both Maine and Vermont when those states attempted to require (Maine) or encourage (Vermont) school consolidation.

[67] See, generally, Driscoll, L.E. *The Effectiveness, Value, and Importance of Small School Districts.* Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' Small and Rural School District Task Force. Amherst, MA (2008) and CSDE. *Report on the Study of Small School Districts Pursuant to Section 17 of Public Act 12-116*. Hartford (2013).

In Maine, legislation passed in 2007 required districts with fewer than 2,500 students to join with other districts to form regional districts, set a timeline for districts to do so, and imposed fiscal consequences for districts that did not do so. The end result of this effort was a reduction in the total number of school districts in Maine from 290 to 164, but in the face of on-going lobbying, the fiscal consequences were never fully implemented and the legislation was ultimately repealed. Many of the consolidated districts that were formed have begun exploring ways to break back into smaller districts. Maine's effort at legislatively driven consolidation should not be considered a model for emulation.[68]

Vermont took the more typical route of encouraging voluntary consolidation of school districts without mandating it. Legislation passed in 2009 required districts to consider merging with other districts, and, for districts that did pursue this option, incentives were provided through temporary reductions in residential property tax, grants to fund the study committees determining the feasibility of merger, and forgoing reimbursement of state school construction grants if schools were closed as a result of regionalization. By 2012, three years after the enactment of this legislation, only two new regional school districts had been formed.[69]

Recognition that there can be a strong preference for retaining local school districts is one reason Connecticut has established formalized procedures for the creating of regional school districts. Without support from the majority of voters in each involved town, a regional school district cannot be formed. Two of the most common concerns of voters considering formation of a regional school district are the potential loss of a local school building and the degree of representation and control that municipality's representatives will have in regional school district governance. These are discussed in more detail in Appendix H. Also as explained in Appendix H, each regional school district is governed by its own board of education that will set priorities and policies reflecting the judgment of the board members elected from each of the member towns. Such priorities and policies will often reflect compromise, and may not be the priorities and policies that would be set by a local board of education responsible for the schools in a single town.

Logistical considerations. Geography and population density can prove a deterrent to formation of a regional school district. Towns may not be able to agree on where – that is to say in what town – regional middle and high school buildings should be located. Towns may also have concerns that the regional school district will want to close a small elementary school and bus the students to another town – leaving one town with an unused school building and potentially no convenient location for holding evening meetings, voting, or hosting recreation programs.

Geography may also contribute to logistical concerns regarding student transportation. There may be concerns about needing to cancel school more frequently due to inclement weather affecting some but not all of a multi-town geographic area. In addition, longer distances to

[68] Fairman, J. and Donis-Keller, C. School District Reorganization in Maine: Lessons Learned for Policy and Process. *Maine Policy Review*, 21:2 (2012).
[69] Rogers, J.D., Glesner, T.J., Meyers, H.W. Early Experiences Implementing Voluntary School District Mergers in Vermont. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 29:7 (2014).

school buildings may result in lengthier travel times and increased transportation costs. Depending on where school facilities and administrative offices are located, there can also be challenges to conducting district wide trainings and providing centralized administrative oversight due to travel times between facilities.

Questions about potential cost savings. There is some research suggesting that cost savings may not always be realized in relation to the formation of regional school districts.[70] As noted above, there may be increased transportation costs to get all students to consolidated schools. In terms of staff, there may not be any significant reduction in numbers of either certified or non-certified staff. Some small districts may manage most district operations with one or two administrators and one or two clerical staff handling all administrative, back office, and operational functions. There are also situations where a small local board of education is sharing back office and operational functions – such as building and grounds maintenance – with the municipality. If a regional district is formed, it may need both administrative staff and specialized back office and operational staff to manage the increased demands of the consolidated system. Moreover, the sharing of services with municipal government would need to be reconsidered and possibly discontinued as a result of forming a regional school district.

Additionally, in relation to teachers and other unionized staff, merging two or more districts into one district normally requires consideration or how to integrate employees from multiple districts into the same bargaining units. This typically requires all employees performing similar work to be paid at the highest rate of any of the bargaining units to be combined. Similarly, the newly formed regional school district may need to adopt the most highly valued benefits and paid time off policies across all bargaining units to be combined.

Agri-Science Centers

Connecticut's Regional Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers (known as agri-science centers) were first established in 1955 as vocational-agricultural centers, through a regional pilot program at Middletown High School.[71] The recent name change from "vo-ag" centers to agri-science centers reflects the increased need for science, technology, and math to complete these programs.

Procedures for the establishment and operation of agri-science centers are outlined in statute.[72] Agri-science Centers serve students in grades 9-12, and may only be operated by local or regional school districts. An agri-science center is required to have a consulting committee to advise the local operating board of education. Two representatives from each participating district serve on the center advisory board. Representatives are required to have knowledge in the

[70] See, e.g., Driscoll, L.E. *The Effectiveness, Value, and Importance of Small School Districts.* Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' Small and Rural School District Task Force. Amherst, MA (2008).

[71] State-aided vocational-agricultural courses were in existence as early as 1920 in the towns of Simsbury, Woodbury, Washington, Killingly and Thompson. See, State Department of Education Division of Vocation, Technical and Adult Education, Bureau of Vocational Services. *Agriculture Education in Connecticut: A Summary Report*. June 1992.

[72] C.G.S. Secs. 10-64 through 10-66.

areas of agriculture or aquaculture. According to regulation,[73] each regional agricultural science consulting committee must meet at least twice per year to review and assist in evaluating the agri-science center. Additional oversight is provided by a CSDE education consultant who conducts an on-site program review of each center every three to five years.

The purpose of agri-science centers is to provide opportunities for interested students in local and regional school districts to receive an agricultural science and technology education.[74] An agri-science center is usually embedded in an existing high school.[75] The centers operate on a full-year basis in order for students to receive occupational instruction and supervision in occupational experience programs during the summer months.[76] Throughout the summer at least one teacher is available every day to provide any assistance needed in connection with occupational placements.

School districts that do not have agri-science centers must designate one or more centers in other districts for students to attend, and agreements are formed between each sending school district and its designated agri-science center.[77] The agreement formed between the center and sending district may include the number of available program acceptances and admission criteria.[78] An agreement between the sending school and an agri-science center must specify in writing a certain number of students each school will send or receive, or in the absence of specific numbers, the sending school must send at least the average number of students who attended in the last three school years.[79] Districts are required to give agri-science center personnel access to their schools for recruiting purposes. Appendix I provides a listing of the sending school districts for each agri-science center and other information, including model programs in other states.

In 2014, there were 19 agri-science centers located in 14 local and five regional Connecticut public schools. Appendix I also contains the agri-science center locations. Some agri-science centers have ceased operation for a variety of reasons, notably the agri-science centers in Hartford and Waterbury. The State Board of Education recently approved the application for Region 12 to be the twentieth agri-science center. Following necessary town approvals, Region 12 will be applying for grants from the state for building and equipping the new center.

The total number of students enrolled in agri-science centers has increased about 13 percent from 2010 to 2014, or by approximately 350 students in the past five years. State grants to agricultural science and technology centers more than doubled during this same time period, from $4,560,565 in FY 10 to $9,485,565 in FY 14.

[73] Conn. Agency Regs. Sec. 10-64-1.
[74] C.G.S. Secs. 10-64 to 10-66.
[75] Only the Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Center, and the New Haven Regional Agriculture/Aquaculture Science and Technology Center, Sound School are standalone programs not embedded in high schools.
[76] Conn. Agency Regs. Sec. 10-64-2.
[77] C.G.S. Sec. 10-64(d).
[78] C.G.S Sec. 10-64(a).
[79] C.G.S. Sec. 10-65(b).

Table 6-2 lists the number of students enrolled in each of the agri-science centers in the 2013-2014 school year. The total number of students enrolled in agri-science centers statewide was 3,443 in 2014. This represents less than one-tenth of one percent of all Connecticut public school students. The number of students enrolled in individual agri-science centers ranges from 59 students (Vernon) to 506 students (Bridgeport), with a median enrollment of 130 students.

Table 6-2: Agri-Science and Technology Center Enrollment and CSDE Payment Information for 2013-2014

School District	Number of Students Enrolled in ASTCs	Average CSDE Payment Per Student
Bridgeport	506	$2,883
Region 14	336	$2,788
New Haven	334	$2,883
Wallingford	262	$2,729
Ledyard	247	$2,871
Trumbull	195	$2,757
Region 1	186	$2,082
Region 6	165	$2,514
Southington	139	$2,686
Killingly	130	$2,808
Region 19	130	$2,745
Glastonbury	123	$2,361
Region 7	115	$2,598
Stamford	111	$2,268
Suffield	107	$3,412
Bloomfield	107	$2,404
Middletown	99	$3,632
Lebanon	92	$3,006
Vernon	59	$2,860
Total	**3,443**	**$2,757** (Median)

Source: PRI staff analysis of CSDE data.

Local and regional school districts operating agri-science centers are eligible for regular school construction grants, whereby the state reimburses school districts for a certain percent of eligible costs.[80] The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), depending, for example, on the number of out-of-district students served, provides operating grant payments to agri-science centers for each student attending the program. Table 6-2 also shows the average CSDE payment per student enrolled in each agri-science center in 2014, ranging from a low of $2,082 (Region 1) to a high of $3,632 (Middletown), with a median payment of $2,757. The district where the student lives also pays tuition to the district operating the agri-science center. There is no tuition cost to the parents, and the home school district is responsible for providing transportation for students attending agri-science center programs.[81]

Advantages of agri-science centers. Offering specialized agricultural science programs within each local or regional school district is simply not feasible, and, as illustrated by the small percentage of students attending the programs, it is more cost effective to transport interested students to regionally located agri-science centers. Regional agri-science center graduates tend to have positive outcomes, benefiting the students individually as well as the economy. In the most recent five year follow-up on agri-science center graduates, 52 percent had received at least a bachelor's degree, 24 percent an associate's degree or certificate, and five percent owned an

[80] Prior to July 2011, districts operating agri-science centers could receive regular school construction grants equal to 95 percent of eligible costs. Projects occurring July 2011 or later, may receive 80 percent reimbursement for eligible costs.

[81] The state reimburses districts for a portion of the transportation costs based on the school district's wealth, with poorer districts receiving a higher percentage reimbursement. The state must also reimburse districts for transportation costs exceeding $800 per student at a rate that is 20 percent higher than the sending district's usual transportation reimbursement percentage (C.G.S. Sec. 10-64 (d)).

agricultural business. Most (93 percent) were gainfully employed. Nearly all (96 percent) who started college received their college degrees. Majors included: animal science; biology and chemistry; horticulture; civil and mechanical engineering; natural resources management; forestry; nursing and pre-veterinary medicine; plant science; recreational management; agriculture education; primary and secondary education; Spanish; government relations; forensic science; and business management.

Barriers and challenges to agri-science centers. Despite the positive outcomes of graduates, agricultural science centers are not necessarily available to all students who wish to attend them, and, over time, there is also a trend toward decreased enrollments in agri-science centers. Students eligible for admission into agri-science center programs are only given the opportunity to apply, they are not guaranteed the right to attend. In a 2012 report by the Connecticut Agriculture Science and Technology Education State Consulting Committee,[82] it was noted that more than 1,100 students were on waiting lists for agri-science center programs, representing more than one third of all who applied statewide, despite many of the state's agri-science centers being able to accommodate more students with increased resources.

Reasons given for decreasing enrollment in some agri-science centers include lack of instructional capacity due to having teaching vacancies, or decreasing recruitment efforts for students to attend agri-science centers. The 2012 CSDE report noted the agri-science center in Killingly had 120 students despite a capacity for 175 students due to a lack of funds to hire the additional agricultural teachers needed to instruct the additional students.

The CSDE report posited that, due to the relatively higher tuition and transportation costs required to send students to agri-science centers, there were financial disincentives for sending schools to promote this option. Districts hosting the agri-science center also lack incentives to invest in and recruit students for these programs, as they are not fully reimbursed for their costs, including those for additional teachers, equipment and facilities (estimated loss of approximately $5,000 per pupil).

It should also be noted that as students simultaneously apply to each of several of the options available for high school (e.g., magnet schools, charter schools, agri-science centers, and technical high schools), a finite pool of students is spread over an increasing array of options. According to CSDE waitlists are not universally used across the 19 centers, so it is unclear if there are qualified students seeking to attend agri-science programs who are unable to do so. Approximately two-thirds (68 percent) of the 2,196 applicants from the class of 2009 were accepted into an agri-science center but only 1,490 (68 percent of those accepted) chose to attend. In 2014, 700 students statewide were accepted into agri-science programs but did not attend, in contrast to only 400 that were not accepted.

[82] Connecticut Agriculture Science and Technology Education State Consulting Committee. Proven Success, Untapped Potential: How Current Policies Hinder CT's Regional Agriscience High Schools from Meeting the Needs of a Vigorous Economy. February 2012.

Designated High Schools

Any school district that does not have a high school must designate at least one high school its students can attend.[83] The school district then pays the necessary tuition and provides transportation for students to attend that high school. There are 17 Connecticut K-12 districts that do not have their own local or regional general education public high schools: Bozrah, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Columbia, Eastford, Franklin, Hartland, Lisbon, Norwich, Pomfret, Preston, Sherman, Sprague, Union, Voluntown, Winchester, and Woodstock.[84] According to data collected from districts by CSDE, during the 2014-15 school year, these 17 districts designated 16 different high schools for their students to attend. Table 6-3 illustrates these designations.

Table 6-3: Local District Utilization of Designated High Schools (2014)

District	Number of High Schools Designated	High Schools Designated
Bozrah	1	Norwich Free Academy
Brooklyn	2	Killingly, Woodstock Academy
Canterbury	3	Griswold, Norwich Free Academy, Woodstock Academy
Columbia	4	Bolton, Lebanon, Region 19, Windham[b]
Eastford	1	Woodstock Academy
Franklin	2	Lebanon, Norwich Free Academy
Hartland	2	Granby, The Gilbert School
Lisbon	2	Griswold, Norwich Free Academy
Norwich	2	Ledyard, Norwich Free Academy[a]
Pomfret	1	Woodstock Academy
Preston	1	Norwich Free Academy
Sherman	3	New Fairfield, New Milford, Region 12
Sprague	2	Montville, Norwich Free Academy
Union	2	Stafford, Woodstock Academy
Voluntown	2	Griswold, Norwich Free Academy
Winchester	1	The Gilbert School [a]
Woodstock	1	Woodstock Academy[a]

Notes:

[a] Denotes an endowed private academy that function as the public high school in the communities in which they are located. Even the town/school district in which an endowed academy is located must tuition its high school students to the endowed academy and has the option of designating other high schools or establishing its own high schools. Other nearby districts may also chose to use the endowed private academy as a designated high school.

[b] Columbia stopped using Windham as a designated high school in 2012. Columbia students who had previously started attending Windham high school continued to do with the last class of such students slated to graduate in June 2015.

Sources: PRI staff analysis of CSDE data.

The number of students sent to designated high schools by each district ranged from a low of 29 (Union school district) to a high of 1,585 (Norwich school district). The Norwich school district must be considered a special case, as it houses one of Connecticut's three endowed academies – the Norwich Free Academy (NFA). NFA, along with Woodstock

[83] C.G.S. Sec.10-33.

[84] With the exception of thee districts – Hartland, Sherman, and Winchester – these districts are clustered on the eastern side of the state.

Academy and the Gilbert School, serve as the primary public high school in the municipalities in which they are located.[85] Excluding the three sending communities in which the endowed academies are located (Norwich, Winchester, and Woodstock), the greatest number of students from a single district being sent to designated high schools in 2014-15 was 294 from the Brooklyn school district, with 164 students attending Woodstock Academy and 130 attending Killingly High School. Excluding the towns in which endowed academies are located, the median number of students sent from each designating town was 125 and the average number was 135. This roughly translates to 31 to 34 students per grade for each sending town.

The number of students received by designated high schools per district also varied considerably. Again omitting the local districts sending students to an endowed academy within municipal borders, six districts receive fewer than 20 students from individual sending towns, and six districts receive over 120 students from individual sending towns. The median number of students sent to one school by one district is 63, and the average number sent is 68. These numbers are much lower than the total number of students sent because so many districts allow students to choose from more than one designated high school.

Table 6-3 also shows how many high schools were designated by each of the 16 districts that did not have a high school in 2014. Some sending school districts only identified one designated high school, such as Bozrah (all 95 of its high school students attend Norwich Free Academy), or the Eastford school district (all 59 of its high school students attend Woodstock Academy). Two-thirds of sending districts, however, designate multiple districts, offering their students a choice of high schools. For example, the Sherman school district designated three high schools for the 2014-15 school year: 20 students went to Region 12, 66 students went to New Fairfield, and 93 students went to New Milford.

Advantages to designated high schools. Some of the advantages to districts either sending to or hosting a designated high school mirror those of forming regional school districts. Two or more districts realize economics of scale in operating one school instead of multiple schools and by having one larger school instead of several smaller schools. In addition, all students may benefit from increased curricular offerings, extracurricular activities, and other school services. Some also identify it as a social benefit that students are exposed to and being educated with a larger number of students from outside their immediate community.

Unique advantages to designating a high school include districts not having to undertake the process of finding partner towns and establishing a regional school district and each district being able to exit the relationship if desired. Additionally, the hosting district retains full control over the education offered in its high school, without the need for a shared board of education to set policy. A sending district can express its dissatisfaction with any changes in the hosting district's policies by choosing to discontinue the designation after the expiration of any previously agreed upon term,[86] and students and families residing in the sending district may also be able to exercise choice by selecting another high school if their district designates multiple high schools.

[85] Only Norwich reported to CSDE that its students have an additional choice of designated high school – Ledyard High School, which was reported to be attended by 21 Norwich students.

[86] C.G.S. Sec. 10-35 provides that an agreement between a sending and receiving high school district can be for a period not exceeding ten years.

The high school designation relationship typically involves a tuition rate being negotiated between the sending and receiving districts. In the absence of agreement as to a fair tuition rate, the sending district can choose not to continue the designation. The non-continuation of a designated high school agreement may make provisions for the sending district students who are currently attending the receiving high school to complete their senior year while no new students from the sending district begin to attend the receiving school. This recently occurred between Columbia and Windham. Columbia stopped designating Windham High School in 2012, but Columbia students who had started at Windham High School in 2011 and earlier were allowed to continue to attend through June of 2015.

Barriers or challenges to designated high schools. One drawback to designating high schools is that there can be adjustments to the agreed upon tuition rates after a school year has ended. This happens as a result of the completion of the audit from the prior school year. If the audited costs are higher than the tuition, then the receiving school district sends the sending school district a reconciliation bill. For the sending district, this is a mid-year cost that could not have been anticipated.

A theoretical disadvantage to relying upon a designated high school is that a sending school district may eventually be told by the receiving district that the receiving district cannot continue to accommodate the sending district's students.[87] Likewise, a receiving school district also faces theoretical uncertainty as to future enrollments if it hosts a number of students from other districts and one or more of those districts choose to discontinue the designation. PRI staff did not hear that this theoretical drawback was of concern to any districts participating in a designated high school relationship.

PRI staff did not hear from any interviewees about any other current concerns about designated high school arrangements or about designation agreements that had ended badly. Anecdotally, some interviewees mentioned that the formation of some of Connecticut's regional school districts had been triggered by increasing in-district enrollments in designated high schools leading those districts to notify sending districts that they would not be able to continue accepting out-of-district students by designation in the future. In this era of declining school enrollments, this is unlikely to be an issue of concern in the foreseeable future.

Cooperative Arrangements Pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a

Another alternative for school districts wishing to cooperatively provide one or more educational services is to enter into a cooperative arrangement with another district pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a. First enacted in 1961 (P.A. 61-544) with the title "An Act Concerning School Supervision Districts," the original intention of 10-158a was to allow districts to not only share superintendents, but to also share other educational programs and services without the need to form a regional school district, thus retaining the ability to terminate such arrangements with appropriate notice.[88]

[87] C.G.S. Sec. 10-35.
[88] See generally, Joint Standing Committee Hearings – Education (1961) pp. 128-131 and 138-140.

Through the 1960s there were multiple revisions to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a, including those passed in 1967 through "An Act Concerning Joint Activities of Boards of Education" (P.A. 67-160) and in 1969 through "An Act Concerning the Powers of Inter-District Committees Appointed by Boards of Education Pursuant to a Voluntary Agreement" (P.A. 69-333). These revisions were triggered by activities in Connecticut following the enactment of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. Many regional groups of boards of education had formed for the purpose of procuring federal grant funding to offer services to benefit all districts.[89] In the mid-1960s these groups were not authorized to act as their own fiscal agent, so one BOE would have to apply for the funding and disburse it on behalf of all member districts of the regional entity. The desired result of the amendments to 10-158a was to simply and clearly "permit any committee created by two or more boards of education for the purpose of carrying out their duties under the law cooperatively to hold title to real or personal property in trust for such boards of education and to receive and disburse local, state, federal, public or private funds granted or donated to such committee."[90] Such a committee, for the duration of the cooperative arrangement, could be considered a situational regional school board.

In its current form, C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a allows school districts to form cooperative arrangements which must be:

(1) in writing; and

(2) to provide for the carrying out of one or more of the statutory responsibilities of the participating boards of education;

and <u>may</u> include:

(3) the establishment of a committee to supervise such programs or services.

If a district chooses to create a committee to supervise such programs or services, the committee may: apply for and receive state or federal grants available to school districts; receive and disburse funds from the participating school districts, state, or other sources; hold title to property; employee personnel; and enter into contracts.

Generally speaking, C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a provides that a participating district can withdraw from a cooperative arrangement with written notice given at least one year prior to the withdrawal. In the event that a cooperative arrangement received a grant for a school building project, however, the cooperative arrangement is expected to use the building for a period of twenty years. If the cooperative arrangement ceases to use the building, the Commissioner of Education is to determine whether title to the building should revert to the state or if the state should be reimbursed an amount equal to ten percent of the eligible school building costs. A few interviewees also referred to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a as a mechanism that could be used to share school programs or services with another district without forming a regional school district and having to overcome the political resistance that this might entail.

[89] Some of these groups evolved into Connecticut's RESCs.

[90] Comments of Mrs. Laura Pope of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education on February 25, 1969. <u>Joint Standing Committee Hearings</u> – <u>Education</u> (1969) pp. 553-54.

As recently as 2013, there was limited information about any school districts in Connecticut using C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a as a mechanism for jointly providing services to students.[91] PRI staff did learn, however, of two current cooperative arrangements regarding joint building projects.

Cooperative arrangements to share school buildings. The two cooperative arrangements PRI identified both included one school district that had formerly designated a high school in another district entering into an agreement with that district to jointly seek state building grants. In each case, the cooperative arrangement requires that the two towns continue to use the state funded building for twenty years. One of these cooperative arrangements involves the Salem and East Lyme BOEs and was entered into in 1997.[92] It allowed the districts to jointly seek grant money to expand East Lyme High School. Currently Salem has approximately 250 high school students attending East Lyme's high school with East Lyme's approximately 875 high school students. The other cooperative arrangement, which involves Sterling and Plainfield, was formed in 2001, and provides for the two districts to jointly construct a new high school facility, located in Plainfield, for the students of both towns. Sterling currently has about 135 high school students attending Plainfield's high school with Plainfield's approximately 600 high school students.

Shared superintendent or centralized administration. Historically, C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a authorized school districts to share superintendents or otherwise create a joint supervisory unit. No Connecticut school districts currently do so, except those districts collectively associated with a regional school district serving only grades 9-12 or 7-12. The potential of sharing a superintendent, or establishing centralized administration, merit discussion as options available to Connecticut school districts, but may be of limited interest for a variety of reasons.

Shared superintendents. Several individuals at the RESCs, CSDE, within town governments, and at labor organizations reported there had been times in the past where districts that were not associated with a regional school district shared a superintendent. PRI did find one instance where a very small Connecticut school district (having less than 1,000 students) employed a part-time superintendent who also worked as a part-time superintendent in a school district in New Hampshire; however this is not an example of Connecticut school districts sharing a superintendent. Although Connecticut districts are not currently sharing school superintendents, such arrangements do exist in other states. In New Jersey there were reported to be over two dozen shared superintendents in 2013, and it was reported at that time that increasing numbers of small school districts were sharing superintendents largely as a form of cost containment.[93]

Barriers to using C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a to share superintendent. Although no interviewee directly challenged the possible cost savings of two small districts sharing a superintendent, many interviewees noted that sharing a superintendent across districts can lead to tension or

[91] See OLR Report No. 2013-R-0204: Cooperative Agreements Under § 10-158a.
[92] Public Act 96-270 (Sec. 9), codified at C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a (c), established the conditions applicable to a cooperative arrangement receiving a grant for a school building project. Public Act 97-247 (Sec. 15) established specific provisions relating to cooperative arrangements that provide student transportation.
[93] Boser, U. *Size matters: A look at school-district consolidation*. Center for American Progress. August 2013.

frustration. The most challenging aspect of sharing a superintendent in the past is reported to have been balancing the needs of each district. Staff or a BOE in a district sharing the time of a single superintendent with one or more other districts may at times feel that the superintendent should be prioritizing its immediate needs over the immediate needs of another district. Another logistical challenge to sharing a superintendent could arise in relation to BOE or other district specific meetings. Two districts in which the BOEs historically meet on the same night of the week might be reluctant to share a superintendent because one district would necessarily have to change its BOE meeting night so that the superintendent could attend BOE meetings in both districts. There must be a certain amount of trust of the superintendent as well as flexibility and cooperation between BOEs for a shared superintendent arrangement to work.

Another potential challenge to two districts sharing a superintendent may be a limited pool of candidates interested in the shared position. According to CSDE, it is primarily very small single-school districts with no high school that choose to employ superintendents on a part-time basis, typically two or three days a week. These districts often employ individuals who have retired from full-time superintendence of larger districts, and they typically have contracts to perform the essential superintendent functions while working a few days a week and relying on the school principal or other administrative and operational staff to manage the day-to-day responsibilities that might otherwise fall on the shoulders of a full-time superintendent or a superintendent in a larger multi-school district. Some of these part-time superintendents also report spending more hours each week attending to district matters than is called for in their contracts, but seem to enjoy serving a community that cannot justify employing a full-time superintendent. Part-time superintendents with whom PRI staff spoke expressed no interest in either cutting back on hours spent in their part-time role or in looking to get a second part-time superintendent job in another district. An individual superintendent serving two or more districts would also face multiple evening meeting demands for each district, especially during budget season.

It should also be observed that the cost savings associated with two districts sharing a superintendent, unless accompanied by further centralization or sharing of administrative functions, is unlikely to yield large cost savings. The very small districts employing part-time superintendents may not be able to find a candidate willing to share the position with another town for a salary significantly smaller than the current part-time single-district superintendent. Moreover, if two or more districts can only find a candidate for a shared superintendency who is interested in obtaining various employee benefits, these may significantly increase the cost to each district of employing a shared superintendent as compared to the cost of continuing to employ a part-time superintendent with no employee benefit package.

Centralized multi-district administration. C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a could also be used to create shared administration for a group of school districts. This would be similar to the way groups of districts associated with a single regional school district share both a superintendent and a centralized administrative office, as discussed in Appendix H. In Region 4 and Region 9, for example, the superintendent and central administrative offices serve the regional school district and all associated elementary districts. In Region 11, comprised of Chaplin, Hampton and Scotland, there is an administrative office and superintendent serving Region 11 and the Chaplin public schools.

PRI staff spoke to a few superintendents and business managers involved in the centralized administration of these regional school districts and associated elementary schools. Advantages to the shared arrangement included:

- having a smaller number of highly paid administrative personnel among the group of districts;
- the ability to hire specialized administrative personnel for the group of districts when the individual districts might not be able to afford to do so independently or when offering only a part-time position;
- being able to coordinate purchasing and the concomitant economies of scale; and
- improved ability to ensure consistency in elementary curricula as pertains to readiness for entry into the regional school district.

The most obvious disadvantages to such centralized administrative arrangements included, especially during budget season, the sheer number of meetings that the superintendent and business manager needed to attend. If a single superintendent and administrative office serves three elementary districts and one regional school district, they must prepare four separate budgets to present and defend at the board of education level. Three of the four budgets are for local towns, and will be presented in tandem with the municipality's proposed budget and may be subject to revision as the community attempts to balance the needs of the education system with other governmental needs.

A related challenge to either a shared superintendent or centralized administrative office arrangement is the need for centralized administrative personnel to build knowledge and forge relationships within multiple communities. Each community may have different priorities and beliefs about the appropriate educational services to be offered by its schools. In relation to this disadvantage, it should be noted that this is not simply the same challenge faced by a centralized administrative staff in a multi-school district. There is a distinct difference in serving schools in different communities that are not united under a single municipal government. Even in towns that seem demographically similar, there can be differences in the social, educational, and political climate, which may manifest in differences in how each community envisions the kind of education it wants to provide for its children.

Other authority for cooperative arrangements between boards of education. The 1960s saw as expansion of the focus of C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a from an act concerning shared supervisory districts to an act concerning any joint activities of boards of education. The 1990s saw the enactment of specific subsections relative to shared building activities and joint transportation activities. In light of the many ways C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a has been viewed, it is not surprising that there has been a lack of clarity about what broad and specific purposes it can and should serve.

A more general "service sharing" law was enacted in 2010.[94] That statute, codified at C.G.S. Sec. 10-239k succinctly states: "Any two or more boards of education may, in writing, agree to establish shared service agreements between such boards of education or between such boards of education and the municipalities in which such boards of education are located."

[94] P.A. 10-167 (Sec. 1).

Unlike "cooperative arrangements" pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a, "shared service agreements" have no specified requirements beyond being in writing. The legislative intent was clearly to empower boards of education to voluntarily cooperate with other boards of education in order to provide services for their mutual benefit.

Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 10-239k had its genesis in a recommendation by the Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (M.O.R.E.) Commission that the legislature clarify any confusion about restrictions on the applicability of Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 10-158a. Based on discussion about the bill on the floor of the House of Representatives, it appears that some local boards of education were resistant to exploring cooperative efforts to share services based on a belief that they were not statutorily empowered to work with other local boards of education or municipalities to share services such as payroll, purchasing, or other back office operations.[95]

Advantages and barriers to the formation of cooperative arrangements. For the most part, the advantages to formation of cooperative arrangements to carry out the duties of boards of education are the same as those of forming regional school districts or designating high schools. Some interviewees, for example, indicated that formation of cooperative arrangements allowed for regionalism without the seemingly permanent surrender of local control over education and educational budgeting of a regional school board.

Findings Related to Other Forms of Educational Cooperation

The PRI committee finds that regional school districts are only one way for municipalities and/or local school districts to combine resources and realize economies of scale in educating students from multiple towns. Other mechanisms, that are likely to encounter less political resistance, include, at the high school level, agri-science centers and designated high schools, and, at any grade level, cooperative arrangements pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a, and shared service arrangements pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-239k.

[95] Proceedings of the House of Representatives on April 29, 2010.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Study Scope

Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education

Focus

Regional cooperation between local boards of education can vary widely, from two school districts developing a cooperative arrangement to provide adult education together, to the creation of a regional school district serving children in grades K-12. This study will examine the prevalence, advantages, and disadvantages of such efforts and identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding potentially beneficial regional cooperative efforts.

Background

Regional cooperation for educational purposes is authorized in a number of different statutes, including:

- Two or more local boards of education may enter into a cooperative arrangement to share programs and services "to enable such boards to carry out the duties specified in the general statutes." (C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a)

- Two or more local or regional boards of education may enter into an agreement to establish a regional agricultural and technology center. (C.G.S. Sec. 10-64)

- A board of education that does not have a high school may send its students to a designated high school located in another school district per an agreement between the two boards. (C.G.S. Secs. 10-33 and 10-35)

- Regional educational service centers (RESCs) may be established at the request of four or more school boards with CSDE approval. (C.G.S. Sec. 10-166a)

- Two or more towns are permitted to establish a regional school district (C.G.S. Sec. 10-39).

Currently, more than a dozen high schools have regional agricultural science and technology centers that provide training for students planning a career in agriculture. There are 17 regional school districts in the state, with the most recent established in 1987 (Regional District #19, providing grades 9-12 for students in the towns of Ashford, Mansfield, and Willington). Six Regional Education Service Centers help boards of education communicate and collaborate in such areas as professional and curriculum development, special education, and human service programs.

Regional cooperation between local boards of education has been part of the efforts of the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), regional planning organizations, and 2002 program review committee study of regional school district governance. The recent Municipal Opportunities & Regional Efficiencies (MORE) Commission also studied various aspects of regional cooperation between local boards of education, and the proposed PRI study is seen as complementing rather than duplicating these efforts. In 2015, proposed bill no. 778 required PRI to "study regional cooperative agreements between local boards of education."

Areas of Analysis

1. Identify existing cooperative efforts between two or more local boards of education including:
   - Regional school districts
   - Regional Education Service Centers
   - Regional Agricultural Science and Technology Centers
   - Shared operational arrangements (e.g., administrative services, assistive technology equipment, procurement, transportation)
   - Shared instructional arrangements (e.g., shared staff, special education programs)

2. Describe selected cooperative efforts including:
   a. Number of school boards of education involved per agreement
   b. Relative proximity of the schools involved
   c. Grade level of educational services involved
   d. Duration of the agreement
   e. Purpose of the agreement

3. Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of certain regional cooperative efforts
   a. Assess the impact of the agreement on costs, service offerings, or other outcomes

4. If examples are available, examine reasons why attempts to establish cooperative arrangements or regional school districts were not completed

5. Identify cooperative arrangements between local boards of education in other states
   a. Determine if and under what circumstances any advantageous efforts may be replicated in Connecticut

6. Describe barriers to replicating and expanding advantageous regional cooperative efforts in Connecticut
   a. Recommend methods and practices to overcome or minimize these barriers

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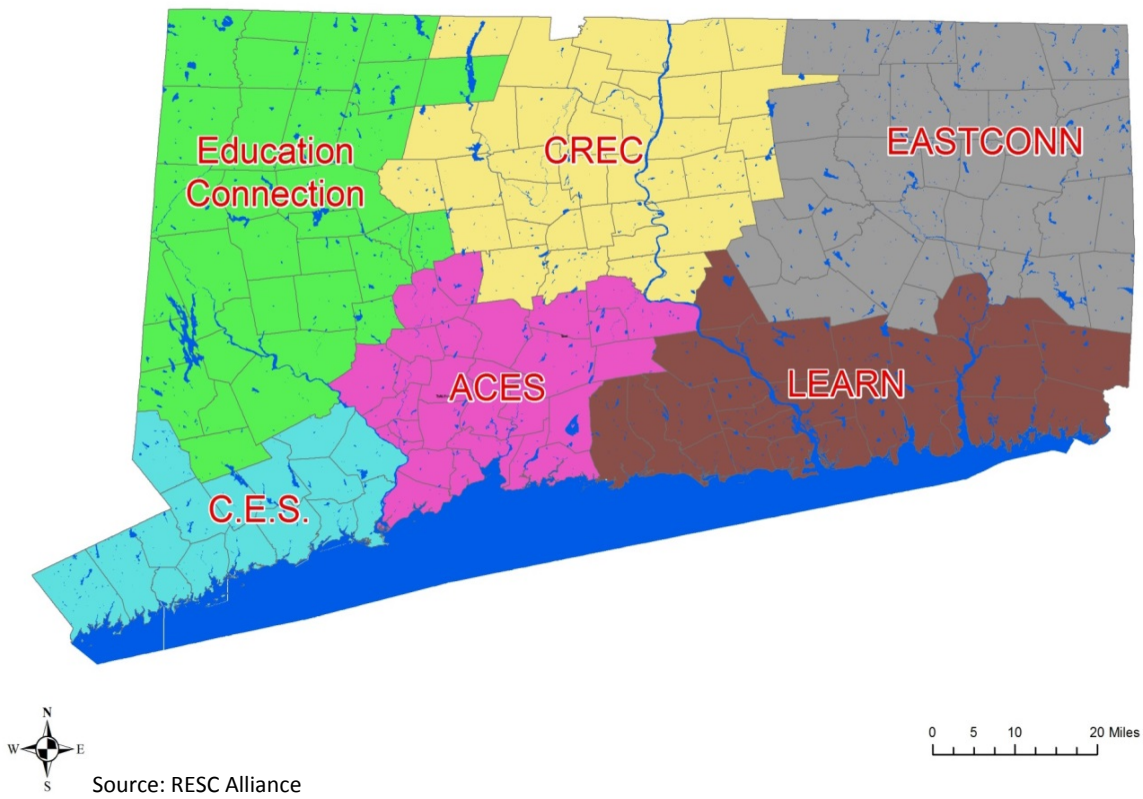
Appendix B

RESC Catchment Areas

Figure B-1. RESC Catchment Area Map



Source: RESC Alliance

Table B-1. School Districts Belonging to Each Regional Education Service Center

Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) School Districts			
Ansonia	Meriden	North Haven	Seymour
Bethany	Middletown	Orange	Wallingford
Branford	Milford	Oxford	Waterbury
Cheshire	Naugatuck	Reg. District 5	West Haven
Derby	New Haven	Reg. District 13	Wolcott
East Haven	North Branford	Reg. District 16	Woodbridge
Hamden			
Cooperative Education Services (CES) School Districts			
Bridgeport	Monroe	Ridgefield	Trumbull
Darien	New Canaan	Shelton	Weston
Easton	Norwalk	Stamford	Westport
Fairfield	Reg. District 9	Stratford	Wilton
Greenwich			
Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) School Districts			
Avon	East Windsor	Manchester	Somers
Berlin	Ellington	New Britain	Southington
Bloomfield	Enfield	New Hartford	South Windsor
Bolton	Farmington	Newington	Suffield
Bristol	Glastonbury	Plainville	Vernon
Burlington	Granby	Portland	West Hartford
Canton	Hartford	Reg. District 10	Wethersfield
Cromwell	Hartland	Rocky Hill	Windsor
East Granby	Harwinton	Simsbury	Windsor Locks
East Hartford			
EASTCONN School Districts			
Andover	Eastford	Marlborough	Stafford
Ashford	Franklin	Plainfield	Sterling
Bozrah	Griswold	Pomfret	Thompson
Brooklyn	Hampton	Putnam	Tolland
Canterbury	Hebron	Reg. District 8	Union
Chaplin	Killingly	Reg. District 11	Voluntown
Colchester	Lebanon	Reg. District 19	Willington
Columbia	Lisbon	Scotland	Windham
Coventry	Mansfield	Sprague	Woodstock
EDUCATION CONNECTION School Districts			
Barkhamsted	Litchfield	Redding	Salisbury
Bethel	New Fairfield	Reg. District 1	Sharon
Brookfield	New Milford	Reg. District 6	Sherman
Canaan	Newtown	Reg. District 7	Thomaston
Colebrook	Norfolk	Reg. District 12	Torrington
Cornwall	North Canaan	Reg. District 14	Watertown
Danbury	Plymouth	Reg. District 15	Winchester
Kent			
LEARN School Districts			
Clinton	Ledyard	Norwich	Reg. District 18
East Haddam	Madison	Old Saybrook	Salem
East Hampton	Montville	Preston	Stonington
East Lyme	New London	Reg. District 4	Waterford
Groton	North Stonington	Reg. District 17	Westbrook
Guilford			

Appendix C

Sample for PRI Structured Interviews of Local K-12 Superintendents

This appendix describes the process and methodology used to select school districts for inclusion in PRI staff interviews of superintendents.

Survey Sample and Subgroups

Of the 166 school districts in Connecticut, 122 serve grades K-12 and are not regional school districts.[1] These 122 school districts became the pool to be sampled from as they were similar in at least the grades served and did not contain the very different regional school districts (described in Chapter 7 and Appendix H of this report). Thus, any differences found could not be attributed to grades served or regionalized school district.

Sample stratification by school district size. As suggested by the literature and in key stakeholder interviews, size of school district was thought to be a key variable in explaining prevalence of regional cooperation. PRI staff wanted to develop a sample that was representative of school district size. Six categories of school district size were developed ranging from under 1,000 students, the number used by the legislature to define small school districts for purposes of a 2013 study on issues pertaining to small school districts,[2] to large urban districts of at least 15,000 students. Table C-1 shows the number and percent of school districts in each of the categories for all 122 schools, and the same information for the randomly selected sample of 56 school districts. In general, the resulting sample reflects school district size for the 122 school districts, with a slight oversampling of the larger school districts, and slight undersampling of the smaller districts.

Table C-1: PRI Superintendent Survey Sample by Size Group

PRI Size Group	Number in Group	Percent in Group	Number in Sample	Percent in Sample
1 = Under 1,000	24	19.7%	10	18%
2 = 1,000-1,999	18	14.8%	7	12%
3 = 2,000-2,999	26	21.3%	10	18%
4 = 3,000-7,200[a]	41	33.6%	20	36%
5 = 8,000-12,000[a]	8	6.6%	5	9%
6 = 15,000 or more[b]	5	4.1%	4	7%
	122	100%	56	100%

Notes:

[a] There are no local K-12 school districts that have between 7,200 and 8,000 students or between 12,000 and 15,000.

[b] The largest school district in Connecticut had 21,304 students during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Sources: PRI staff analysis of CSDE data.

[1] There are 16 school districts grades K-5, 11 school districts grades K-8, and 17 regional school districts.
[2] P.A. 12-116, Sec. 17.

Two PRI staff each contacted districts in the random order that they had been assigned. If a district declined to participate in the survey, that analyst would then move onto the next district on her assigned list. Very few superintendents declined to participate in the study. Table C-2 contains an alphabetical list of the districts that participated in the survey.

Table C-2: Districts Participating in PRI Superintendent Survey

Bloomfield	East Hartford	Ledyard	Southington
Bolton	East Haven	Madison	Stafford
Bozrah	Eastford	Milford	Stamford
Branford	Ellington	Naugatuck	Sterling
Bristol	Fairfield	New Britain	Union
Brookfield	Farmington	New Canaan	Wallingford
Canton	Glastonbury	New Haven	Waterbury
Clinton	Granby	New London	Waterford
Columbia	Greenwich	Newtown	Weston
Coventry	Griswold	North Stonington	Westport
Danbury	Guilford	Oxford	Wethersfield
Darien	Hamden	Plainfield	Wilton
East Granby	Hartford	Plymouth	Windsor
East Haddam	Killingly	Sherman	Woodstock

Similarity between the sample and full 122 school districts on DRG and RESC catchment area. In addition to school district size, PRI staff also assessed the representativeness of the sample in terms of DRG and RESC catchment area. There are some differences between the sample and overall group of 122 school districts for DRG, with the sample having slightly more school districts in DRGs A and I, and slightly fewer in DRGs E and F (Table C-3). The sample closely reflects the overall group of 122 school districts regarding RESC catchment area (Table C-4).

Table C-3: PRI Superintendent Survey Sample by DRG

DRG	Population (N=122)		PRI Sample (n=56)	
	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts
A	6	5%	5	9%
B	17	14%	9	16%
C	11	9%	6	11%
D	24	20%	10	18%
E	18	15%	7	12%
F	15	12%	4	7%
G	15	12%	7	12%
H	9	7%	3	5%
I	7	6%	5	9%
Total	122	100%	56	99%[a]

Notes:

[a] Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Sources: PRI staff analysis of CSDE and survey response data.

Table C-4: PRI Superintendent Survey Sample by RESC

RESC	Population (N=122)		PRI Sample (n=56)	
	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts
ACES	19	16%	9	16%
C.E.S.	15	12%	8	14%
CREC	33	27%	15	27%
EASTCONN	24	20%	11	20%
EDUCATION CONNECTION	13	11%	5	9%
LEARN	18	15%	8	14%
Total	122	101%*	56	100%

Notes:

[a] Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Sources: PRI staff analysis of CSDE and survey response data.

Appendix D

Cooperative Agreement Telephone Interview of Superintendents

District :_____ Date of Survey:_____

RESC:_____ Size Group:_____ DRG: _____

Respondent Name:_____

Respondent Title/Position:_____

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
COOPERATIVE PURCHASING – YES / NO				
Tangible Items – YES / NO				
Educational and/or School Supplies	Yes No			
Office supplies (e.g. copy paper)	Yes No			
Custodial/ Food Service supplies	Yes No			
Furniture, Fixture and Equipment (FFE) (e.g. copy machines, desks)	Yes No			
Computer hardware or software (both ed. and non-ed.)	Yes No			
Heating oil/gas	Yes No			
Other utilities (e.g. electricity)	Yes No			
Vehicles	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
Services and Insurances – YES / NO				
Health insurance	Yes No			
Premises liability insurance	Yes No			
Other insurances	Yes No			
Legal services (for labor relations or relating to special ed)	Yes No			
Waste management services (regular, hazardous or eWaste)	Yes No			
Environmental safety services (training staff custodial/grounds)	Yes No			
Security services	Yes No			
School health services or school nurse	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
ADMINISTRATIVE or BACK OFFICE FUNCTIONS – YES / NO				
Shared Administrative Staff – YES / NO				
Superintendent	Yes No			
Business Manager/ Finance Director/Staff	Yes No			
HR Director/Staff	Yes No			
IT Director/Manager	Yes No			
Grant application/ administration	Yes No			
Other	Yes No			
Financial Services – YES / NO				
Accounting/Auditing	Yes No			
Payroll	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RES	Other
Human Resources – YES / NO				
Recruitment/Hiring	Yes No			
Personnel Records	Yes No			
Fingerprinting/ Background Checks	Yes No			
EAP	Yes No			
Other	Yes No			
Food Service – YES / NO				
Shared director or other staff	Yes No			
Shared purchasing food or supplies	Yes No			
Fully shared operation	Yes No			

Area	Agreement	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
Facilities and Grounds – YES / NO				
Shared facility maintenance personnel	Yes No			
Shared grounds maintenance personnel	Yes No			
Shared contract for custodial or grounds	Yes No			
Shared equipment or maintenance of	Yes No			
Shared purchasing of janitorial supplies	Yes No			
Shared purchasing of grounds supplies (e.g. salt/sand, fertilizer, pesticides)	Yes No			
Construction/ Renovation/Repair materials (e.g. paving, roofs, athletic turf)	Yes No			
Shared bidding/ contracting (e.g. exIQC)	Yes No			
Information Technology – YES / NO				
Joint education software licensing (e.g. PowerSchool, on-line	Yes No			
Shared office/ accounting software (e.g. MUNIS, School	Yes No			
Website maintenance	Yes No			
IEP or student record keeping software (e.g. Powerschool)	Yes No			
End user training for use of technology	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
TRANSPORTATION – YES / NO				
General Education – YES / NO				
In-district transportation	Yes No			
Out-of-district transportation	Yes No			
Special Education – YES / NO				
In-district transportation	Yes No			
Out-of-district transportation	Yes No			
Other	Yes No			
Other Transportation – YES / NO				
Transp. for field trips/athletics	Yes No			
Bus Driver/Aide training	Yes No			
Drug and alcohol testing for operators	Yes No			
Vehicle maintenance	Yes No			
Vehicle fuel	Yes No			
Automated bus routing	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
SPECIAL EDUCATION PUPIL PROGRAMS and SERVICES – YES / NO				
Separate classrooms or programs for special education students, such as with autism or mental health needs	Yes No			
Transitional programs for older high school students	Yes No			
Clinical Day or Extended Day Treatment programs	Yes No			
Physical Therapy	Yes No			
Occupational Therapy	Yes No			
Social Work/ Counseling	Yes No			
Speech/Language Therapy	Yes No			
Behavioral Services (e.g. BCBA for ABA)	Yes No			
Psychological Services	Yes No			
Psychiatric Services	Yes No			
Services for deaf or hearing impaired	Yes No			
Assessments/Evaluations	Yes No			
Summer/Extended School Year Programs for special education students	Yes No			
Assistive Technology	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE-RESC	Other
GENERAL EDUCATION PUPIL PROGRAMS and SERVICES – YES / NO				
Early childhood education including, IDEA Pre-K, HeadStart, General Education	Yes No			
English Language Learner (ELL) programs	Yes No			
Adult education community offerings	Yes No			
Adult ed – GED GED/ESL/Citizenship	Yes No			
Shared content or delivery program (e.g. art, music, languages)	Yes No			
Gifted/Talented program	Yes No			
Latchkey services (before and/or after school care)	Yes No			
Programs for suspended or expelled students	Yes No			
Substitute teachers (listing, calling, assignment)	Yes No			
Distance or on-line learning program (e.g. Odyssey)	Yes No			
Shared athletics or other extra-curricular activities	Yes No			
Summer School (for non-special ed students)	Yes No			

Area	Agreement?	2+ BOEs	BOE- RESC	Other
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT and SERVICES – YES / NO				
Training Workshops or conferences/Continuing education for teachers and other professional staff	Yes No			
Training Workshops or conferences/Continuing education for para professionals and other non-certified staff	Yes No			
Curriculum development	Yes No			
Teacher coaching	Yes No			
Teacher evaluation (developing rubrics, shared consultants, in-house training, technical assistance)	Yes No			
Grant/report writing	Yes No			

Can you think of any cooperative agreements that your district participates in that I have not asked you about? If so, please describe.

Are any of the cooperative agreements that you identified above in writing?

Is there any limitation on your district's ability to withdraw from any of the cooperative agreements identified above? (e.g., a requirement for one year notice)

What would you say are the factors that go into deciding whether to form a cooperative agreement?

Can you think of any examples of times when you thought about forming a cooperative agreement, but the agreement didn't actually occur?

Are there any cooperative agreements or shared services that stand out for you as having resulted in the greatest efficiency for your district, either in terms of cost savings or improved services for students, or in some other way?

Would you be able to provide us with specific information about (example) that we might be able to use in our report? (If so, get contact info--name and number/email address for person to contact for more information?)

Area of Efficiency	Contact Person/Info

Thank you very much!

Appendix E

CASBO Survey of Non-Educational Shared Services

Early in the study process, PRI staff learned that the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) had recently completed a survey of its members for purposes of identifying what kinds of cooperative non-educational or operational arrangements had been established by Connecticut school districts. The survey results provided the foundation for updating a White Paper previously published in 2003. CASBO released its updated Shared Services White Paper in October of 2015.[1] The CASBO survey and white paper were helpful to gaining a fuller appreciation of current school district practices which reduce costs through cooperation. This appendix will discuss the CASBO survey results as they inform PRI's study of cooperation involving boards of education.

Survey Methodology and Findings

The methodology used by CASBO was to distribute an electronic survey available to each district in which there was a CASBO member. CASBO staff estimate that the survey was distributed to 155 districts, with 83 districts responding – a 54 percent response rate. Information on which school districts responded to the survey was kept confidential. While it is unknown if responding districts were fully representative of all districts, findings were relatively similar to PRI's superintendent survey.

The survey allowed one of four responses in each of 29 categories: (1) district is independent; (2) share with another district/RESC; (3) share with town; and (4) town is responsible completely.

Table E-1: Districts Cooperating with Another District/RESC in Operational Areas

Service Category	Number	Percent
Bidding/Purchasing (n=81)	8	10%
Cafeteria Director (n=82)	7	9%
Energy Purchasing (n=81)	6	7%
Transportation (n=82)	6	7%
Medical Benefits (n=83)	5	6%

Source: PRI Staff analysis of CASBO 2015 data.

Overall, CASBO's survey found that school districts are involved in many cooperative relationships for operational services, although more of these relationships involve school districts and municipalities rather than two separate school districts. Seventy-seven of the eighty-three districts responding to the survey (93 percent) reported sharing at least one service with a municipality. Sixty-two of these districts (75 percent) were sharing five or more administrative or operational services with a municipality.

[1] Connecticut Association of School Business Officials. *Shared Services Whitepaper*. West Hartford, CT (2015). Available on line at http://www.ct-asbo.org/news/257813/CASBOs-2015-Shared-Services-Whitepaper.htm.

CASBO determined from these responses that the five categories in which the greatest number of districts participated in shared services with another school district or RESC were: Bidding/Purchasing, Energy Purchasing, Cafeteria Director, Transportation, and Medical Benefits. Interestingly, the degree to which cooperation is occurring in each of these areas is still relatively small, as shown in Table E-1. In The percent of all respondents cooperating with another district or RESC in each of these areas ranged from six percent to ten percent. Overall, only 19 districts (23 percent) shared one or more services with another school district or RESC, and only three districts (3.6 percent) were sharing three or more administrative or operational services with another school district or RESC.

Two of the categories in which districts reported either that they were cooperating with a municipality or that a municipality was totally responsible for providing that service are categories in which there was the most frequent cooperation with another district or RESC – medical benefits, and energy purchasing. These areas, along with workers compensation and property and liability insurance, are ones in which districts and municipalities have parallel needs. Two other areas in which sharing a service with a town was frequently reported were equipment intensive areas where it was unlikely that two districts would be geographically situated in such a way as to make sharing convenient – snow removal and maintenance of athletic fields. Table E-2 lists the categories in which over half of all districts responding to CASBO's survey indicated that services were shared between districts and a municipality or where a district reported that a municipality was completely responsible for that service.

Table E-2: Districts cooperating with a town in operational areas or where town responsible completely

	Number	Percent
Property insurance (n=83)	70	84%
Liability insurance (n=83)	69	83%
Workers comp (n=83)	66	80%
Medical benefits (n=83)	53	64%
Energy purchasing (n=80)	46	58%
Maintenance of athletic fields (n=82)	44	54%
Snow removal (n=83)	44	53%

Source: PRI Staff analysis of CASBO 2015 data.

CASBO made its de-identified survey data available to PRI staff for additional analysis. Before deleting its district identifiers, CASBO coded each district by the size categories PRI staff used to draw the sample school districts for the superintendent interviews. The number of respondents to CASBO's survey from each size category is shown in Table E-3. There are some differences between the responding districts and the overall group of 166 districts by district size, namely that the sample is under-representative of very small districts (under 1,000 students) and over-representative of small mid-sized districts (2,000 to 2,999 students).

Each PRI operational category, and an analysis of CASBO's survey data within that category, is presented below. The categories have been ordered to first address those areas in which districts most often cooperate with another district or RESC (pupil transportation) and conclude with the category in which there is the least such cooperation (administrative and back office functions).

Table E-3: Representativeness of CASBO Survey Sample

District Size (number of students)	Number in Group (Statewide)	Percent in Group (Statewide)	CASBO Respondents	Percent of Sample
Very Small (<1,000)	53	32%	14	17%
Small (1,000-1,999)	28	17%	15	18%
Small-Mid Size (2,000-2,999)	30	18%	23	27%
Mid-Size (3,000-7,200)	42	25%	25	30%
Large (8,000-11,500)	8	5%	5	6%
Very Large (>15,000)	5	3%	1	<2%
Total	166	100%	83	99%[a]

[a] Does not equal 100% due to rounding

Source: PRI Staff analysis of CASBO 2015 data.

Pupil Transportation

The CASBO survey included Transportation Services as a single category where respondents could indicate that their district either was independent, shared services with another district or RESC, shared services with a town, or that a town was solely responsible. Eighty-two districts responded to this survey item. No district reported that the town was solely responsible and nine (11 percent) reported that they shared transportation services with either another district/RESC or a town. Of the nine districts that did cooperate around transportation services, six districts (7 percent of all districts responding) indicated that they shared transportation services with another district or RESC and three districts indicated they did so with a town. These figures are lower than what was found in the PRI staff interviews of superintendents.

When PRI staff reviewed CASBO's data in relation to the size groupings, it emerged that the districts sharing transportation services with another district or RESC were all in the very small through mid-size range (district-wide enrollment of up to 7,200 students). It cannot be discerned from the survey responses whether these districts coordinate all general and special education transportation activities or only a small portion thereof.[2] Two of the three districts that indicated they shared transportation services with a town were in the large size category (district-wide enrollment of 8,000-11,000 students). Although it cannot be determined from the survey responses what these cooperative arrangements might look like, it highlights the fact that in some cases the absence of cooperative arrangements with another district or RESC may be explained by a district realizing efficiencies through cooperation with another kind of partner.

[2] As explained in Chapter 3, districts may have multiple transportation contracts, and even if they have one contract, they may still be permitted under the contract to use alternate providers for certain kinds of transportation (e.g. to transport special education students to an out-of-district special education school).

Cooperative Purchasing

The CASBO survey asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they were collaborating in relation to six items within the category of cooperative purchasing. These were general bidding/purchasing, energy purchasing, and four types of insurance: property, liability, medical, and workers compensation. Most cooperative purchasing was taking place through arrangements with a town rather than with another district or RESC.

In the general bidding/purchasing category, 28 of 81 districts responding (36 percent) were involved in cooperation with another district, RESC, or town. One district reported a town was solely responsibility for all purchasing. Eight districts (10 percent of all districts responding) indicated they cooperated with another district or RESC. Approximately two-thirds of all districts that cooperated with another entity for bidding/purchasing (19 out of 28) were cooperating with a town, rather than another school district or RESC. The 19 districts reporting bidding/purchasing with a town reflect 24 percent of all districts responding to this item in CASBO's survey.

Eighty-one districts identified their status in regard to energy purchasing. Over half of these 81 districts (53 percent) indicated that they cooperated with a municipality and a small number (7 percent) indicating they cooperated with another district or RESC. Three districts indicated that a town simply took care of energy purchasing on the district's behalf. All of the large and very large districts (8,000 to 22,000 students) jointly purchased energy with a municipality. Three of the six districts that cooperated with another district or RESC were in the very small (fewer than 1,000 students) size category.

In terms of purchasing health insurance, it again appears that more cooperation is occurring between districts and municipalities than between boards of education or with RESCs. Four districts (less than 5 percent of districts) reported that a municipality was wholly responsible for medical benefits and 49 districts (59 percent) that they shared medical benefits with a municipality. Only 5 districts, all in the very small and small categories (having fewer than 2,000 students), indicated that they were sharing medical benefits with another district or RESC.

In worker's compensation, property and liability insurances, the trend toward sharing services with a municipality was even more apparent. No districts reported sharing any of these coverages with another district or RESC, and the majority said they shared these coverages with a municipality. Fifty-nine districts (71 percent) shared worker's compensation coverage with a municipality, 61 districts (74 percent) shared liability insurance with a municipality, and 62 districts (74 percent) shared property insurance. Another seven districts – one small, three small-mid size, two mid-size and one large – reported that a town was completely responsible for all three of these coverages; another large district cooperated with the town for worker's compensation and reported the town was wholly responsible for property and liability insurance.

Administrative and Back Office Functions

Within the category of administrative and back office functions, there were six categories of questions on the CASBO survey, those relating to: cafeteria services; maintenance of facilities

and vehicles; information technology; finance operations; human resources; and safety and security.

Cafeteria services. Three school districts reported that they shared cafeteria services with another school district or RESC. Seven districts, while maintaining their own cafeteria services, shared the services of a cafeteria director with another district or RESC. The districts sharing a food services director were in the very small through mid-size groups, with five of the seven being in districts of between 1,000 and 7,200 students.

Maintenance of facilities and vehicles. There were eight separate items on the CASBO survey that related to maintenance of facilities and vehicles. These items were in the areas of: buildings (maintenance of buildings, building cleaning, and building maintenance/repairs); grounds (maintenance of school grounds, athletic fields, sidewalks and parking lots, and snow removal), and vehicles. No district reported sharing any of these services with another district or RESC.

Buildings. Three-quarters of districts responding indicated they were totally responsible for building maintenance (78 percent), 92 percent for building cleaning, and 90 percent for building maintenance/repairs. Where districts were sharing these services with a municipality, it was more likely to occur with very small (fewer than 1,000 student) districts (5 of 14 districts, 36 percent).

There were only a handful of CASBO respondents indicating that a municipality was totally responsible in any of these categories: with two districts indicating that a municipality handled building cleaning, maintenance of buildings, and building maintenance/repairs and another district indicating it was solely responsible for building cleaning while a municipality was solely responsible for both maintenance of building and building maintenance/repairs.

Grounds. As occurred with building maintenance categories, no district reported sharing services with any other school district or RESC. Table E-4 shows the areas where the school district was most likely to handle all grounds related activities. Several districts do have cooperative

Table E-4: Districts cooperating with a town for facilities operations or where town is responsible completely

	District Solely Responsible	Service Shared with Town	Town Solely Responsible
Maintenance of School Grounds (n=83)	45 (54%)	28 (34%)	10 (12%)
Maintenance of Sidewalks and Parking Lots (n=82)	42 (51%)	32 (39%)	8 (10%)
Maintenance of Athletic Fields (n=82)	38 (46%)	23 (28%)	21 (26%)
Snow Removal (n=83)	39 (47%)	30 (36%)	14 (17%)

Source: PRI Staff analysis of CASBO 2015 data.

arrangements with a municipality in each area. Finally, 10 to 25 percent of all responding districts report a municipality has sole responsibility in each area.

The districts reporting service sharing with a municipality were spread across all six size groupings. It was only in the very small (fewer than 1000 students) through mid-size (3,000 to 7,999 students) districts that respondents reported a town was completely responsible for one or more of these items. Although there has been some speculation that smaller districts engage in more shared and cooperative service arrangements, districts of all sizes reported sharing services with municipalities, and four out of the five large districts (8,000-11,500 students) reported sharing both maintenance of school grounds and snow removal with municipalities.

Vehicle Maintenance. No district reported sharing this service with another district or RESC. Sixty of the 78 districts responding (77 percent) reported being solely responsible for vehicle maintenance, whereas six districts, representing every district size category except the very large (over 15,000 students) and small (1,000 to 1,999), reported that a town was wholly responsible for school district vehicle maintenance. In the remaining 12 districts, at least one in every size category reported sharing vehicle maintenance services with a municipality.

Information technology staffing, computer hardware, computer software, financial management software, and information technology staffing. Four in five districts (67 out of 82 responding, 82 percent) had no shared IT staff. Sharing of IT staff with another district or RESC was reported by only one CASBO survey respondent. Several districts (14 out of 83 responding, 17 percent) did report sharing IT staff with a town. Such districts were in every size category.

Almost all districts reported being solely responsible for or sharing the following IT services with a town: computer hardware, computer software, and financial management software. Just one very small (less than 1,000 students) school district reported cooperative or shared services with another district or RESC in each of these areas. That was the same district that reported sharing IT staff with another district or RESC.

In relation to computer hardware and software, 62 districts (75 percent) were solely responsible for hardware and 61 districts (73 percent) were solely responsible for software. These data include districts in every size category except the very large (15,000 or more students). Eighteen districts (22 percent) shared hardware with a town, and 21 districts 25 percent) shared software with a town. Districts sharing hardware or software with a municipality were in every size category. One small mid-size district (2,000 to 2,999 students) and one mid-size district (3,000 to 7,999 students), reported the town was wholly responsible for hardware, but no districts reported that a town was wholly responsible for software.

Financial management software was the most frequently reported shared arrangement within the IT items on CASBO's survey. Thirty districts (37 percent) shared financial management software with a town. These thirty districts were in each size category. One mid-size district (3,000 to 7,999 students) reported a town was solely responsible for financial management software.

Shared finance office and operations. There were five items relating to this area on CASBO's survey: finance office operations, accounts payable, payroll, budget development, and grants management. A majority of districts reported they were independent for each survey item relating to financial services or operations. Ten districts (12 percent of 83 district responding) reported sharing finance office operations with a town, six reported the same for accounts payable, and five for payroll. Two districts reported that a municipality was wholly responsible for accounts payable and payroll; posing an interesting size contrast one of these districts was small (1,000 to 1,999 students) and the other was very large (over 15,000 students). The same very small district sharing all IT service areas with another district or RESC also reported sharing with another district or RESC in each of the five finance office and operations areas.

Given that board of education budgets are developed independent of municipal budgets, it is not unexpected that that no district reported that a municipality was totally responsible for budget development. Two districts, however, one small (1,000 to 1,999 students) and one large (8,000 to 11,500 students), reported sharing the budget development process with the town.

There are no districts that the town is wholly responsible for grants management. There were, however, six districts (7 percent) in which grants management services are shared with a municipality. These districts ranged in size from very small to mid-sized (up to 7,999 students).

Human resources and negotiations with certified staff. Most districts responding to the survey (91 percent) are completely responsible for all human resources services. The one very small district that reported sharing computer and information technology, and numerous financial services with another district or RESC also reported sharing human resources with another district. No other district reported such a cooperative arrangement with another district or RESC. Also, no district reported that a town was completely responsible for human resources, although six districts did report sharing some human resource services with a municipality.

Negotiations with certified staff were almost never shared with municipalities. Just one mid-sized district reported that it shared negotiation services with a municipality.

Safety and security operations. No district reported sharing safety or security operations with another district or RESC. One quarter of districts (27 percent) shared security services with a municipality.

Appendix F

The National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Participation requires districts to determine for each student in a district whether his or her family has income either less than 130 percent or 185 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). Students are entitled to free (with family income below 130 percent of the FPL) or reduced price (with family income between 130 and 185 percent of the FPL) meals. The district must track the daily numbers of students at each level – free, reduced, and not eligible – to whom lunch is served, and submit this data to CSDE to obtain federal reimbursement for each meal. Meals in each category are reimbursed at different rates. In 2015-16 the base NSLP reimbursement rates (for meals served in districts with fewer than 60 percent of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunches) are $3.07 for each free meal served, $2.67 for each reduced price meal served, and 29 cents for each paid meal served.

Beyond recording the number of meals served, the food service provider must also ensure that all students receive a full meal (rather than just items that the student is willing to eat) that includes a group of food products that have been specified by the USDA as meeting certain nutritional requirements both individually and when assembled into a meal. In addition to regularly submitting data about the foods, meals, and students served to CSDE, at least once every three years each district will have an on-site audit by CSDE staff that will include reviewing menus, ingredient lists, and records of meals served. CSDE staff will also observe the meals on students' trays as they leave the lunch room to insure that each meal in consistent with the USDA standards.

Besides receiving the base reimbursement from the USDA through CSDE, districts also have an option to receive an additional healthy food certification from CSDE by following Connecticut Nutrition Standards for all food sold to children separately from reimbursable school meals. Districts that choose to obtain the healthy food certification can receive an additional 10 cents for each reimbursable lunch served in the district, whether served to a student with free, reduced, or paid lunch status. Examples of requirements for this healthy food certification are that schools not sell soda in vending machines and not sell candy at school stores.

Districts that do not participate in either of the federally reimbursed programs are not required to comply with any specific nutritional guidelines in deciding what foods to offer at school meals or whether to sell food items *a la carte* or only as a pre-set meal. Some of the districts that participate in the NSLP may provide breakfast food service without participating in the school breakfast program, but if such a district has a healthy food certification it would still be required to sell only foods that meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. Such districts would not have to collect and report data to CSDE about the breakfast program.

Although choosing not to participate in the federally funded school meal programs may free districts from certain administrative burdens, schools that provide food services without participating in these programs are usually not able to make free or reduced price meals available to students whose families have limited financial means because they will not be reimbursed by

the federal government for doing so. For some districts, compliance with the requirements of the NSLP may not make financial sense given low percentages of students eligible for free and reduced meals, the degree to which students seek to participate in the school lunch program, and the costs of operating a federally compliant school lunch program.

For other districts, participation in the NSLP allows the districts to provide lunch services without relying on district funds. In such districts the amount reimbursed by the federal government for each meal, when combined with the amounts paid by students not eligible for free or reduced price lunches and students making partial payment toward reduced price meals, provides sufficient revenue for food, supplies, and food service staff salaries without the district needing to contribute funds to support food service operations. At least one RESC provides consulting services to districts to assist in the determination of whether it is financially feasible for a district to operate a compliant school lunch program with an amount of district financial support that is considered an acceptable trade-off for the benefit of being able to provide meals to those students from families at or below 185 percent of the FPL. Because foods and meals served must meet certain nutritional requirements, all students participating in the school lunch program are presumed to benefit, as one of the fundamental premises of the NSLP is that students are more capable of learning when they have been adequately fed.

Appendix G

School District-Municipality Sharing of Back Office and Facilities Management Functions – Benefits and Challenges

The scope of this study addressed cooperation between boards of education. As PRI staff began gathering research and conducting interviews, however, it became apparent that in many non-instructional categories it was much more common for school districts to partner with municipalities than with other boards of education or RESCs. This appendix summarizes the kinds of cooperation currently existing between school districts and municipalities in relation to back office functions and facilities management and the benefits and challenges to such district-municipal cooperation for interested readers.

Shared Back Office Functions

Benefits to sharing back office operations. Despite the concerns and barriers that will be discussed below, districts sharing back office operations with municipalities tend to report that it has been a positive step for both the BOE and town. Most town-BOE back office partnerships do not claim significant cost-savings, but highlight that the process contributes to efficiencies for both entities and to greater cooperation and transparency when it comes to the budget development process and the financial accountability of the board of education. Participants in successful BOE-town financial management partnerships note that the following factors seem to be important to that success:

- spending time cultivating a relationship of trust, including, in many instances regular meetings between the school superintendent and municipal chief executive officer;
- sharing or cooperating in a number of small projects or areas before moving on to sharing of financial services;
- co-location of school district and municipal administrative offices;
- political will on both the town and BOE side to making the partnership work; and
- mutual communication with taxpayers and electors about shared services and the resulting efficiencies improving the municipal budget climate.

Examples of shared back office operations. The Simsbury School District website contains a link to a document summarizing a variety of cooperative efforts between the district and the town, in addition to cooperative efforts between the district and other entities.[1] Although Simsbury does not have fully shared financial management systems, there are many partnerships that could gradually lead to such cooperation: joint energy procurement and management; consolidated employee health insurance; a joint defined compensation retirement plan; shared financial management software; and joint cooperative bidding and cooperative capital projects.

[1] See http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/uploaded/District_Content/BOE/Budget_Update/2015-2015_Budget_Year/Cooperative_Efforts_-_revised_1-13-15.pdf accessed on October 30, 2015.

Another example of a municipality and schools districts reporting positive results from shared back office functions involves the Town of Mansfield collaborating not only with the Mansfield Board of Education but also with Region 19, which also includes the towns of Ashford and Willington.[2] The town of Madison has also shared a finance department with its BOE for over twenty years. The office has 6.5 FTE and the entire office is funded 50-50 by the town and BOE. Although the one finance director oversees both the town side and the school side, most employees are involved if doing either the work of the town or of the BOE. The staff is cross-trained for the purpose of being able to support the work of the other side when they have excess capacity and to be able to cover the work on the other side in the case of worker absences.

The shared financial back office functions in Mansfield and Madison has been well received within each community and constitutes a new status quo of leaner government. Both examples are also being widely discussed around the state as models for other communities to emulate. Given the length of time these arrangements have existed in Mansfield and Madison, it is impossible to say what non-shared services might cost each community at this point in time.

Challenges to sharing back office operations. Although sharing financial and other back office functions between a town and board of education may occur in almost any size community, it has not been universally perceived as beneficial. PRI staff learned of a few municipalities that had tried sharing back office functions with school districts and had reverted to separate systems after a relatively short period of time.

PRI staff was told by administrators and town officials that sharing of financial services may be avoided either due to limited trust between a municipal government and its board of education, or when decision makers view current arrangements as satisfactory and are reluctant to change the status quo. Several individuals also explained that there are significant differences between acting as a business manager for a municipality and doing so for a board of education. The most commonly emphasized differences were the magnitude of the reporting requirements by BOE business officials to the CSDE to meet state and federal requirements and the general intricacies of municipal finance that differed from the operational business management of a school finance office. Given the need for two different knowledge bases and skill sets, some districts and municipalities may be challenged to find qualified candidates for shared municipal-BOE positions.

In communities where the school district and municipality have maintained separate back office systems, these systems may differ enough that creating a single finance, human resource, or other back office department is very challenging. Barriers can include:

- one entity having a one week payroll cycle and the other entity having a two week payroll cycle;

[2] A presentation about shared back office functions in both Mansfield and Madison was made to the M.O.R.E. Commission on July 21, 2015 and is available for viewing at: http://www.ctn.state.ct.us/ctnplayer.asp?odID=11796 (accessed on October 28, 2015). A PowerPoint accompanying the Town of Mansfield's presentation can be found on-line at: http://www.housedems.ct.gov/MORE/MunEff/pubs/MORE-SharedServices_2015-07-15.pdf (accessed on October 28, 2015).

- each entity using different software systems for the functions targeted to be shared;
- separate bargaining units representing the employees for each entity, requiring significant negotiation about how staff from separate units will work together or whether employees can be combined into a single bargaining unit;
- with or without separate bargaining units, employees may have different hours of work and different holidays or other paid time off; and
- not having available space to house shared back office staff.

In addition to the logistical challenges in combining back office functions, many district administrators and municipal representatives often express concern that it could be difficult for a single finance director or business manager to "serve two masters" when developing both a board of education budget and a general government budget. This reflects that at some times, and in some communities, there is a perception that the board of education and municipal government have competing financial interests and that the budget requests of one entity may be unfavorable to those of the other.

Strategies to overcome barriers to sharing back office functions. The town of Tolland recently considered consolidation of its Town Finance Office and School Business Office, and has made its study available through CASBO's 2015 Shared Services White Paper. In addition to describing benefits and drawbacks to two towns that had pursued such consolidation, that study identified concerns about combining these offices in Tolland where:

- there was not readily available building space to accommodate a unified department;
- the departments did not share a software platform and neither was scheduled for imminent replacement; and
- the departments were each staffed by personnel who were members of different bargaining units.

As a result, Tolland, while not ruling out the possibility of future consolidation, chose not to pursue it as of 2015.

Facilities Management

Benefits to shared facilities management. The reported benefits of sharing staff and, more broadly speaking, sharing building and grounds responsibilities between a municipality and a BOE are that the two entities serve, are funded by, and are accountable to the same community. Towns typically own local school buildings and grounds, and may use them outside of the school day and school year for activities ranging from adult and youth recreation to holding meetings and voting. When school buildings cease to be used for educational purposes, it is the town that is left with a building and property that must be either repurposed for municipal use or sold for some other use. In short, towns and BOEs share a common interest in the care and maintenance of school property. The ultimate concern of both entities and the community they jointly serve lies in preserving the utility and value of the property for both current and future use. In addition, the sharing of custodial or grounds maintenance responsibilities provides a relatively low risk opportunity for a town and BOE to develop trust and explore the benefits and challenges of cooperation or service sharing in general.

Challenges and strategies to overcome barriers to shared facilities management. As with shared back office functions, districts and municipalities with shared facilities maintenance staff and/or functions do not typically report significant cost savings. The same amount of work needs to be done for each entity, and it is unlikely that that work can be accomplished with fewer employees. There may be an immediate short-term savings in the salary of management and clerical staff, but this may be offset by the need to establish intermediary levels of management and supervision to replace having a separate facilities manager for each entity.

A frequent challenge of having town building and grounds staff perform work at school related property, or having BOE building and grounds staff perform work in government buildings, is that BOE and municipal staff are usually in separate bargaining units. In some communities administrators or officials noted that the unions do not object to the sharing of employees or one entity's employees performing functions at a property associated with the other entity because it has traditionally been done that way. In one community both the superintendent and town manager explained that when employees belonging to one bargaining unit performed work for the other entity they were paid at a higher rate to reflect the higher wages typically paid to employees belonging to the other entity's bargaining unit. In another community it was reported to PRI staff that there was either a grievance or prohibited practice charge pending related to the use of employees of one entity to perform work for the other.

As with joint business management between a BOE and municipality, many school district facilities directors, superintendents, and business managers believe that schools are more complex facilities to manage and maintain than government office buildings. School buildings are institutions housing large numbers of children for a significant portion of each school day. Building and fire safety codes are more prescriptive, and the physical demands placed on doors, floors, and other parts of the building significantly greater than the demands placed on an office building in which even large numbers of adults are working. In situations where a school district and municipality are considering sharing a facilities director, it may be more successful to add responsibilities for town buildings to a school facilities director rather than assigning school building and grounds responsibilities to a town facilities manager.

Appendix H

Regional School Districts

As explained in Chapter 7, regional school districts (RSDs) are a special kind of cooperative effort where two or more towns agree to create a combined board of education that is responsible for providing the education of some or all of the students of all towns involved. There are currently 17 regional school districts in the state, serving over 27,000 students. Regional school districts generally have the same responsibility and authority as local school districts.[1] Notable exceptions are in the areas of financing and budgeting, where regional school districts are more similar in role and authority to municipalities than local districts.[2] This chapter will provide detailed information on Connecticut's regional school districts, including:

- the history of regional school districts in Connecticut;
- characteristics of RSDs including enrollments;
- process from forming or dissolving RSDs;
- governance of RSDs; and
- cooperation involving regional school districts.

History

The first regional school district in the state was formed in the late 1930s. At the time, legislation specific to the area (Litchfield County) and grade level (high school) was passed to enable the towns to create the regional school district separate from the local school districts.[3] A more general act allowing the formation of regional high schools was passed in 1941, followed by a law in 1945 to allow regionalization of elementary schools.[4] It appears that most of these laws were put in place with little objection, as the state was giving towns additional tools to deal with growing student populations. In 1948, the Connecticut Supreme Court made the following observation about the purpose and background of regional school districts:

> The Connecticut educational system has developed from the small, practically independent school district. The consistent legislative policy has been to consolidate and centralize schools and their administration. . . . Consolidation within the town was at first optional and is now compulsory. . . . The present additional step of permitting towns to consolidate to form regional districts will permit towns unable to give their children the benefit of a modern school plant the power to do this.

Regional High School District No. 3 v. Newtown, 134 Conn. 613 (1948).

[1] C.G.S. Sec. 10-47.
[2] C.G.S. Sec. 10-51.
[3] Special Act 37-428.
[4] C.G.S. 1941 Supplement, Sec. 131f and P.A. 45-226, respectively.

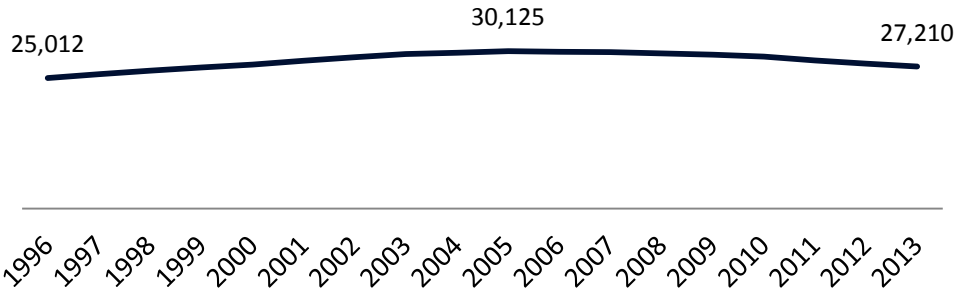
Despite the eventual failure of two early attempts at regionalization,[5] regional school districts were successfully pursued as an alternative to maintaining single-town BOEs from the 1940s through the 1970s. During the course of the study, several stakeholders mentioned that most regional school districts formed during this period because there was increasing enrollment and therefore a need for new physical buildings, which were more cost-effective to build to meet regional needs. Some districts that had previously designated high schools for their ninth through twelfth graders participated in the creation of regional school districts. The earliest regional school districts were formed just for the high school, and sometimes middle school, grades. In the 1970s, several regional districts expanded to include all grades from K-12, and most of the regional districts formed at that time were created as fully integrated K-12 regional school districts.

The last new regional school district (District 19) was established in 1989, over a decade after the previous district (District 18)[6]. District 19 was the first and only regional district established since the start of modern state funding efforts.[7] Since that time, there has also been an increased emphasis on student achievement data, which may amplify any perceived differences between towns that may be looking into regionalizing. That District 19 was established as a regional high school perhaps hints at the continued desire to maintain individual town control, in this case over the local K-8 districts.

Enrollment

There are 17 regional school districts in the state. As of October of 2013, over 27,000 students were enrolled in regional school districts.[8] Figure H-1 shows the number of students enrolled at regional school districts from 1996 to 2013. There has been an 8 percent decrease in enrollment since 2003, the same percentage decrease as for all public school enrollment. Regional school district enrollment peaked at over 30,000 students in 2005, a year later than total

Figure H-1. Enrollment in Regional School Districts

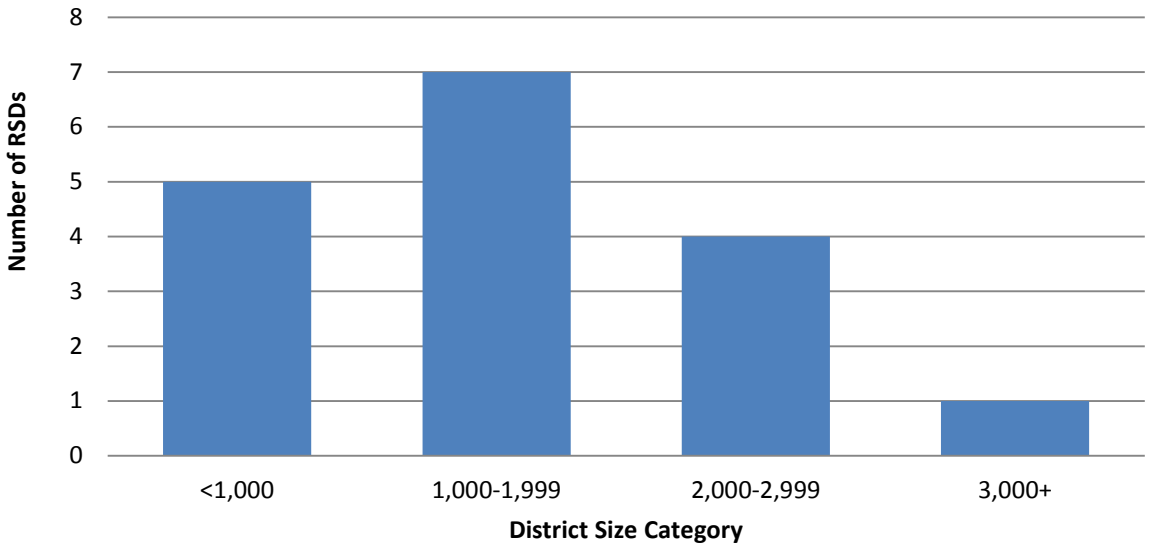


Source: PRI Analysis of CSDE Data

[5] By the late 1940s, regional school districts 2 and 3 had both dissolved.
[6] The district was initially formed by Mansfield and Ashford. Willimantic joined the region in 1993.
[7] The earliest version of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant was passed in 1988.
[8] There are another 12,000 students in the 27 local districts associated with regional school districts, bringing total enrollment for towns involved with regional schools to 39,000 students (seven percent overall).

public school enrollment. Since 1996, enrollment in regional school districts has consistently represented five percent of total student enrollment.

Figure H-2. Size Distribution of RSDs (2013)



Source: PRI staff analysis of CSDE data.

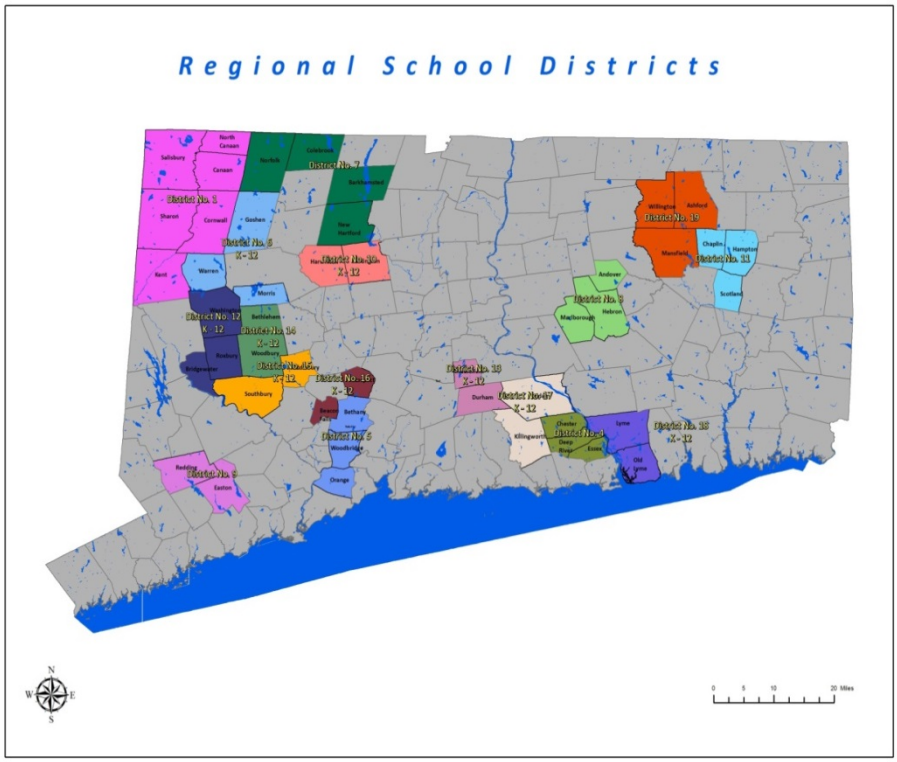
As shown in Figure H-2, regional school districts vary in size from less than 300 students (District 11) to 4,000 students (District 15), with a median size of 1,400 students and a mean size of 1,600 students.[9] This is in contrast to all Connecticut districts, which have a median size of 2,042 and a mean size of 3,075. Five regional school districts are considered small (i.e., less than 1,000 students), another seven have enrollment levels between 1,000 and 1,999 students. Only one regional school district has over 3,000 students.

Figure H-3 shows the geographic location of the 17 districts. As the map shows, regional school districts have primarily been formed some distance away from the state's largest cities, with a couple of exceptions.[10] More towns in Litchfield County are involved in regional school districts than any other county.

Student enrollment among residents in towns associated with regional school districts. Some stakeholders interviewed by PRI staff expressed concern that regional school districts – many of which are already quite small – may see enrollment declines beyond population-based declines because students may be choose to enroll at another public school option (e.g., interdistrict magnets, agri-science programs, charter schools). Thus, PRI staff decided to directly consider this issue based on an analysis of CSDE provided enrollment data for Fall 2013.

[9] These figures look at all regional school districts, regardless of the grade levels they serve. The figures would differ if we include enrollment at associated elementary school districts.
[10] Regional 5 includes two towns that border New Haven, and Region 9 is near Bridgeport.

Figure H-3. Location of Connecticut's 17 Regional School Districts



Source: PRI staff

In 2013, there were 39,960 students listed as residents of towns associated with regional school districts, 38,739 (97 percent) of whom were enrolled in either that regional school district or the local elementary and/or middle school district associated with the regional school district. This reflects little change from 2007 when 98 percent of the resident students attended schools in their regional districts or association elementary districts.

The most common enrollment option other than the regional school district or associated local district was the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS), which enrolled 529 students (1.3 percent) from regional school district towns in 2013. Across all regional school district areas, the number of students enrolled in the CTHSS from a regional school district area has remained steady since 2007. Every regional school district sent at least one student to a CTHSS program in 2013. While 16 of the 17 regions sent less than 2.5 percent of its students to the CTHSS, RSD 11 sent 70 students (8.4 percent) in 2013, up from 57 students (5.9 percent) in 2007. Interestingly, the 70 students sent to the CTHSS by RSD 11 in 2013 was the second highest number of students sent from any regional school district area, despite RSD 11 having the second lowest student population of all regional school district areas. This suggests that there may be unique reasons that RSD 11 students are interested in the CTHSS rather than their being a statewide trend toward increased CTHSS enrollment from regional school district areas.

Although all 17 districts saw a decrease in the number of resident students in their towns between 2007 and 2013, seven different regions (41 percent of all RSDs) saw increases of 20 or more students enrolled from districts outside the region. Nevertheless, 16 of the 17 regional

school districts still enrolled greater than 95 percent of students from towns associated with the district in 2013.

District 8 had the most residents enrolled at a different public school, including the most enrolled at a RESC-controlled school (83) and the most enrolled at Hartford Public Schools (40). In total, there were 182 residents of the RSD 8 associated towns enrolled outside of their own school district in 2013, compared to 63 students in 2007. This increase of almost 120 students enrolling elsewhere came simultaneous to a region-wide loss of 261 resident students in the same time frame, causing an effective decline at the regional school district of 380 resident students. Again, this seems to be a somewhat unique situation involving students from RSD 8 and its associated local districts rather than an indication of a trend involving all RSDs and associated districts.

Table H-1: In-district Enrollment in Regional School Districts

	Total enrollment	Percent enrollment from district towns	Non-district towns with more than 10 students enrolled in RSD
District 01[a]	432	98.4%	0
District 04	983	99.9%	0
District 05	2,372	98.9%	1
District 06[a]	996	87.8%	4
District 07[a]	1,139	91.4%	3
District 08	1,743	99.8%	0
District 09	1,082	99.3%	0
District 10	2,577	99.9%	0
District 11	295	96.3%	0
District 12[b]	800	97.1%	1
District 13	1,875	100.0%	0
District 14[a]	1,905	88.1%	6
District 15	4,002	99.9%	0
District 16	2,352	100.0%	0
District 17	2,281	100.0%	0
District 18	1,411	99.9%	0
District 19[ab]	1,205	83.8%	3
TOTAL	**27,450**	**97.3%**	18

[a] Indicates district hosts agri-science program

[b] Indicates district is a designated high school for one or more districts.

Source: PRI analysis of CSDE data.

Students from other districts. As noted, statewide 97.3 percent of the students enrolled at regional school districts are from the towns that formed the regional school districts. As shown in Table H-1, 13 of the 17 regional school districts had a local enrollment percentage over 96 percent and fewer than 30 students from non-associated towns. The remaining four regional school districts (Districts 6, 7, 14, and 19) host agri-science programs, which draw in students from other towns.[11] Even with the agri-science centers, the majority of students (between 84 and

[11] Regional School District 1 also hosts an agri-science center, but only 7 students (less than 2 percent of enrollment) live outside the 6 towns associated with the district in 2013.

91 percent) in these regional school districts come from the associated towns. Besides the agri-science centers, regional school districts may enroll students outside their towns from nearby towns without high schools; both region school districts 12 and 19 enroll students through the designated high school program.

Funding

Specific town responsibility for funding a regional school district is in proportion to students enrolled in the district who are residents of the town. The proportion of students enrolled between towns associated with the same regional school district varies considerably. Eliminating the students from non-associated towns, single town enrollment proportion in any regional school district ranged from eight percent to 79 percent in 2013. In the same year, there were 11 towns that accounted for more than half of the associated enrollment of a regional school district.

Figure H-4 identifies, for each regional school district, the percentage total enrollment across member towns. All eight of the regional districts with only two towns associated had one town with a majority,[12] along with two of the regional districts with three towns and the one regional district with four towns. Five regional school districts, all with three towns associated, had one town responsible for more than 40 percent, but less than 50 percent, of associated town enrollment. The only regional school district where the town with the highest proportion of enrollment accounted for less than 40 percent of student enrollment was in the six-town region.

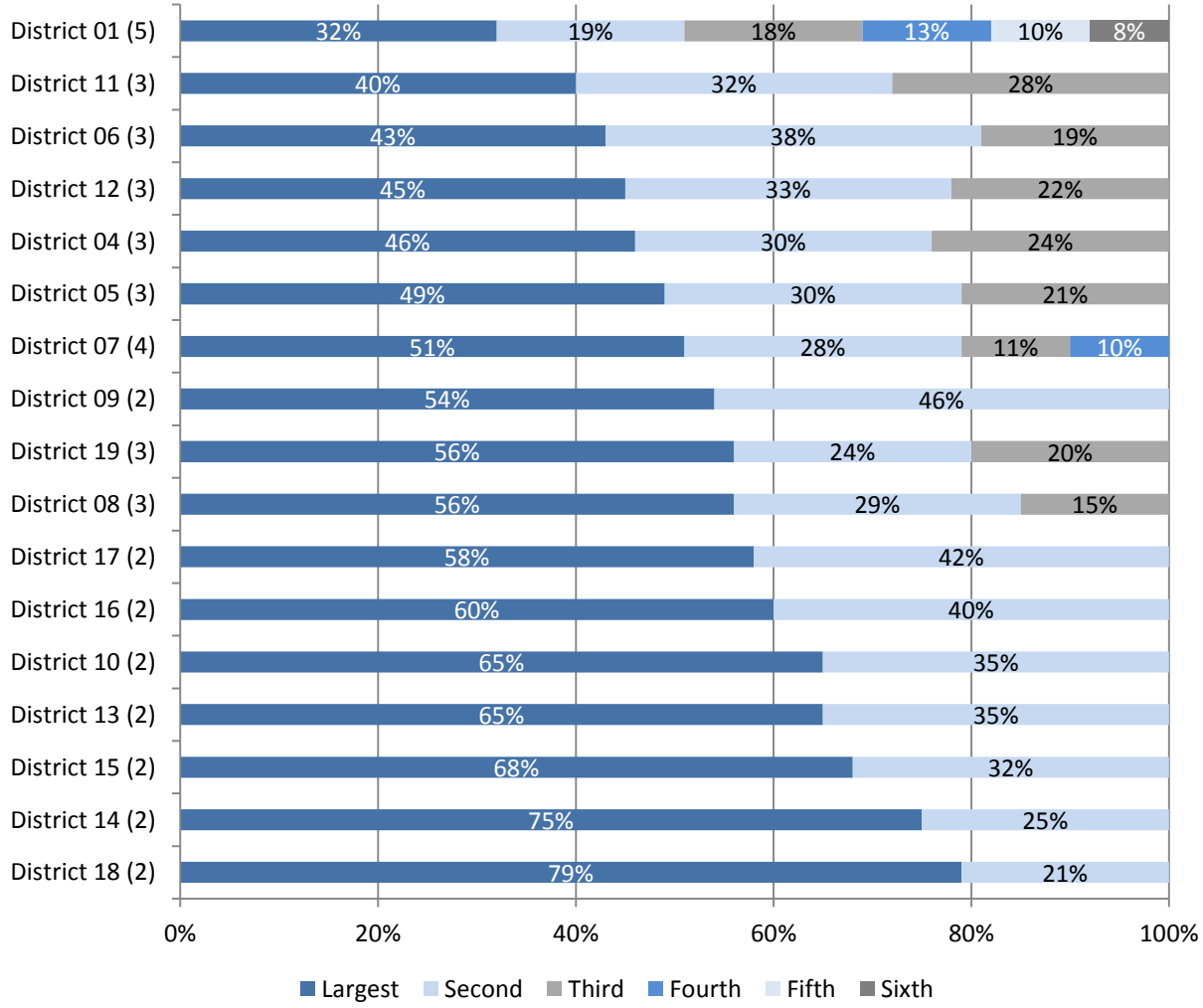
Establishment and Dissolution

There are several formal actions that must be taken before a regional school district can be formed.[13] The process can be initiated by towns, local districts, or regional districts. The possibility of forming a regional school district must be considered by a properly appointed study committee, which must produce a report that details whether and why the formation of the district is recommended. The report must include certain required sections and information, based on whether formation of a regional school district is found to be "advisable" or "inadvisable."[14] In the latter, the report need only include its findings and "an explanation of the reasons for its conclusions." If forming a regional school district is recommended, the report must include the following nine sections:

(1) findings of the committee with respect to the advisability of establishing a regional school district;
(2) towns to be included;
(3) grade levels for which educational programs are to be provided;

[12] A two-town regional school district is expected to have one majority-enrollment town, except in the rare case of a 50-50 split.
[13] C.G.S. Sec. 10-39 through Sec. 10-63t.
[14] C.G.A. Sec. 10-43.

Figure H-4. Proportional Enrollment in Regional School District by Member Towns



Sourece: PRI staff analysis of CSDE data (2013).

(4) detailed educational and budget plans for at least a five-year period including projections of enrollments, staff needs and deployment and a description of all programs and supportive services planned for the proposed regional school district;

(5) facilities recommended;

(6) estimates of the cost of land and facilities;

(7) a recommendation concerning the capital contribution of each participating town based on appraisals or a negotiated valuation of existing land and facilities owned and used by each town for public elementary and secondary education which the committee recommends be acquired for use by the

proposed regional school district, together with a plan for the transfer of such land and facilities;

(8) a recommendation concerning the size of the board of education to serve the proposed regional school district and the representation of each town thereon; and

(9) such other matters as the committee deems pertinent.

The regionalization study report must then be sent to SBE for approval. If the report recommends that the regionalization is advisable, SBE has 30 days from receipt to determine if the reporting requirements have been met and accept or reject the recommendations of the study committee. If the recommendations are rejected, SBE must explain in writing why and the study committee then has another 30 days to modify the report and/or recommendations and resubmit to SBE. If the recommendations are accepted on either first or second review, the process of approval moves ahead.

The final step for approval of a regionalization plan is approval of the voters in each town. These referenda must be scheduled between 45 and 90 days after approval of the recommendations is granted by SBE. Final approval of the plan is only possible with an affirmative vote of the majority of each town through simultaneous referenda – an overall majority is not enough, as every involved town must independently approve the referendum through majority vote.[15] If the vote fails to gain a majority in each involved town, the study committee can decide whether or not to recommend that the towns involved retry the referenda. Town governments must then vote on the study committee recommendation to revote. If they vote to proceed, the referenda are held again in the same manner, still needing a majority of votes in each town to establish the regional school district.

Dissolution or withdrawal. Dissolution of or withdrawal from regional school districts happens in a similar manner to formation of a district. A study committee is formed and, if recommended, the subject of dissolution or withdrawal is put to simultaneous referendum in all the involved towns. In order for the regional district to be dissolved, or for one or more towns to leave the regional district, all towns must vote affirmatively.[16] The dissolution process cannot be entered into for at least three years after either a district is formed or a previous dissolution attempt.

The process to add or withdraw grades from a non-K-12 regional school district is much the same as creating a regional district. A study committee looks at the feasibility and specifics of the change in grade levels, submits the plan to SBE, and poses the question at simultaneous referenda. If a majority of voters in all towns agree, the plan is adopted and the grades are added or withdrawn.[17]

[15] In regional school districts that do not provide all grades K-12, the process to add or withdraw grades to or from the regional school district is similar to establishing a district, except that the expansion or withdraw is based on majority vote of the entire district, regardless of the vote of individual towns.

[16] An exception to the unanimous town rule is that towns can leave with just a majority vote of one town if they are trying to withdraw from a regional school district without a high school.

[17] Per C.G.S. 10-47b (2), an affirmative vote from the majority of all voters, not based on town, is enough to add or withdraw grades if the regional school district in question: 1) has three member towns; 2) the population of each

Though requirements for forming a regional school district are spelled out in statute, both CSDE and the legislature have previously shown a willingness to adjust the requirements to achieve mutually beneficial results (to the state and the districts involved).[18] While it may be tempting to try to lessen the specifics of the requirements for forming a district, the requests for change or exemption have generally been unique to one region and/or time limited, so it may not be particularly beneficial to lessen the statutory requirements at this time. It remains possible that future efforts to create a regional school district will benefit from these provisions of P.A. 15-215.

Governance

Regional school districts are governed by regional boards of education, in much the same way that local boards of education govern local school districts. If a regional school district is established for grades K-12, or if a current regional school district is expanded to include grades K-12, the local school boards in the involved towns dissolve as the regional school board is established.

The composition of a regional school board is recommended within the study committee report, but there are several limitations on how they can be put together. First, boards must be consistent with federal constitutional standards for representation – in this context, this requires that voting power somehow be proportional to the relative size of the populations of each involved town.[19] Next, the board must have at least five members and include at least one member from each involved town.[20]

There are two main ways that regional school boards are populated in a way that satisfies federal representation requirements: weighting the number of members from each town and weighting the vote of each member based on the town they represent. Besides the weighting of board votes based on population, towns can include other special requirements to board voting procedures in the study committee report. For example, a board vote may be subject to an agreement that major decisions (e.g., hiring of a superintendent, annual budgets, changes to board by-laws or policies) must be made with at least one affirmative vote from a representative of each town. Regional board members are usually elected by town, not by a plurality of votes across all towns in the district.

If the education commissioner determines that a region's board is not properly representational of each town, the commissioner can require that a new representation method is adopted in a manner similar to how a regional school district is established. If the new

town individually is between 3,000 and 7,500; and 3) the combined population of the towns is between 10,000 and 20,000. The only regional school district to meet these requirements is RSD 4 (Chester, Deep River, and Essex).

[18] The most recent statutory change anticipated the possible formation of a regional K-6 district by the towns of Colebrook and Norfolk. Sections 19 through 21 of Public Act 15-215 modified existing requirements for newly regionalized school districts to allow a newly formed regional school district to realize cost savings from regionalization beyond what would ordinarily be allowed under the minimum budget requirement and giving such newly formed districts greater flexibility on apportionment of costs to the towns in the first several years after formation. The act also would have helped to ensure that teachers do not lose years of service credit because of merger into a regional school district.

[19] C.G.S. Sec. 10-63k.

[20] C.G.S. Sec. 10-46.

representation method is not adopted by the towns through referenda, or if the commissioner determines that sufficient progress towards that goal is not being made, the board will be required to vote using a weighted method. In this case, the proportional vote of each town is divvied up between however many board members currently represent that town. Representation is reviewed every ten years, following the updated Census.

Authority. Once established, a regional district has the same authority and responsibilities as local boards of education. However, regional boards of education differ from local boards of education with regard to budgeting and financing. Budgets for regional school districts are voted on by residents of member towns annually, either in person at a board meeting or by a paper vote. In either case, the budget for the regional school district is voted on independently of the involved towns' budgets or any other associated local district budget. Unlike formation or expansion of a regional school district, budgets can be passed by a simple majority of voters from all involved towns. This has sometimes created tension if a budget passes in one town but fails in another, regardless of whether that means the budget passes or fails. Regional school districts also have other financial differences from local school districts, including bonding authority.

Regional school districts also receive funding from towns differently than their local counterparts. Once a budget is established, the regional school district divides responsibility for payment of the total expense between the involved towns proportional to the relative number of students enrolled in the district from each town.[21] This proportion is generally based on the enrollment in the previous school year for budgeting purposes, but the regional school board may adjust the proportion to reflect enrollment in the current school year if they so choose.

As funding is based on enrollment, as shown in Figure H-4 for each regional school district, and representation on the school board is based on total population, there is the possibility for disconnect or discontent here. In particular, a region with two towns of similar enrollment, and therefore similar responsibility for funding the school district, may have different enough overall population totals so that one town can consistently override or ignore the wishes of the other on board votes and the annual budget. Adding the so-called cross-over requirements, where at least one board member from each town must affirmatively vote with the majority for major decisions, can possibly help alleviate some of these potential issues, but even that requirement is likely to be subject to a non-town specific majority vote when and if representation on the board is reviewed after the census.

Cooperation Among Towns Through Regional School Districts

In some ways, a regional school district can be thought of us a particularly exhaustive cooperative arrangement to provide educational services. This is especially true in the nine regional school districts that provide K-12 services. A K-12 regional school district is cooperating on all aspects of education provision, including administration, special education, and back office functions. Regional school districts that do not serve all grades are also working cooperatively at the high school and sometimes middle school level, but it is not a given that this

[21] C.G.S. Sec. 10-51 (b).

cooperation has been beneficial in creating financial efficiencies or reducing duplicative administration.

In non-K-12 regional school districts, where the regional school district represents an additional district on top of the local districts, rather than a replacement for those districts. If two towns form a 7-12 district, but remain independent for grades K-6, there are now three independent districts, each with a separate set of requirements and responsibilities, instead of just two. The districts can choose to cooperate for some, many, or nearly all functions, but there is no requirement that they do so. In situations where a town has both a local elementary district and a regional school district, PRI staff observed a wide range of cooperation and coordination in a variety of areas.

The most common forms of cooperation between an RSD and its associated local districts involved administrative and back office functions and special education. For administration, districts involved with a non-K-12 regional district may share a superintendent or have several independent (often part time) superintendents. This can also be true of curriculum directors, business officers, or back office functions like payroll, purchasing, and budget management. In regard to special education, there may be a shared special education department or one or more shared special education staff. Such cooperative arrangements between regional school districts and associated elementary districts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Issues involving unionized staff. Cooperative efforts to share certified staff pose a unique set of challenges. Because there are multiple school districts involved, there are multiple bargaining units and collective bargaining agreements involved, making sharing of personnel particularly tricky. For instance, if a local elementary district determined that it had more 6th grade teachers than was necessary for a given school year and another elementary district that is associated with the same regional school district needed an additional 6th grade teacher, it is not possible to directly transfer a current employee from one district to the other. Instead, that teacher would need to be laid off by the first district and go through the hiring process at the other district, losing whatever seniority and/or tenure that had been accumulated in the first district. The same would be true of a 6th grade teacher trying to move to 7th grade in the regional middle school.

Summary. Through interviews with representatives of regional school districts and related stakeholders, PRI staff identified three major ways of coordinating services between regional school districts and associated local districts:

> **Coordination of services through the regional school district** – In this scenario, the regional school district employs or otherwise pays for personnel (e.g., superintendents, budget officers, or special education coordinators), services, or goods. The expenses can either be paid for by dividing the costs between the regional districts and local districts, or by allowing the regional district to bear the expense and letting the cost be divided by town proportion of enrollment.
>
> **Coordination through a cooperative agreement and/or separate regional entity** – A related organization oversees some aspects of operations. The entity is

generally overseen by representatives of the regional school district and associated local elementary districts, with costs being shared between the same.

Loose or informal coordination – Local districts are in contact with each other and the associated regional school district, but do not have formal arrangements to share administration, special education, or most other major functions.

These categories are not mutually exclusive of one another. In fact, almost all regional school districts use some combination of two or three of the ways of coordinating service. Region 4's Supervisory District, a separate entity overseen by representatives of the three local districts and Region 4, provides special education and certain administrative functions for Region 4 and the three local elementary districts in the region, and the region shares some administrators (i.e., superintendent and business officer) who are employed by the regional school district. In contrast, Region 7 and most but not all of its associated elementary districts are all members of a cooperative education service center called Shared Services, which provides special education services to member districts. Shared Services has member towns that are not associated with Region 7 also. Region 7 and all of its associated elementary districts have different superintendents, nor is there any formal sharing of any other administrative or back office functions.

Comparing each town's percentage of the regional school district population to its percentage of student enrollment can serve as a rough proxy for a comparison of how much control or voting power the town has regarding the administration of the regional district and how much of the district expenses the town is responsible for. More specifically, when a town has more than 50 percent of the population in a region, it will have majority control of the region's board of education and the potential, however unlikely, to unilaterally pass or reject the region's budget.[22]

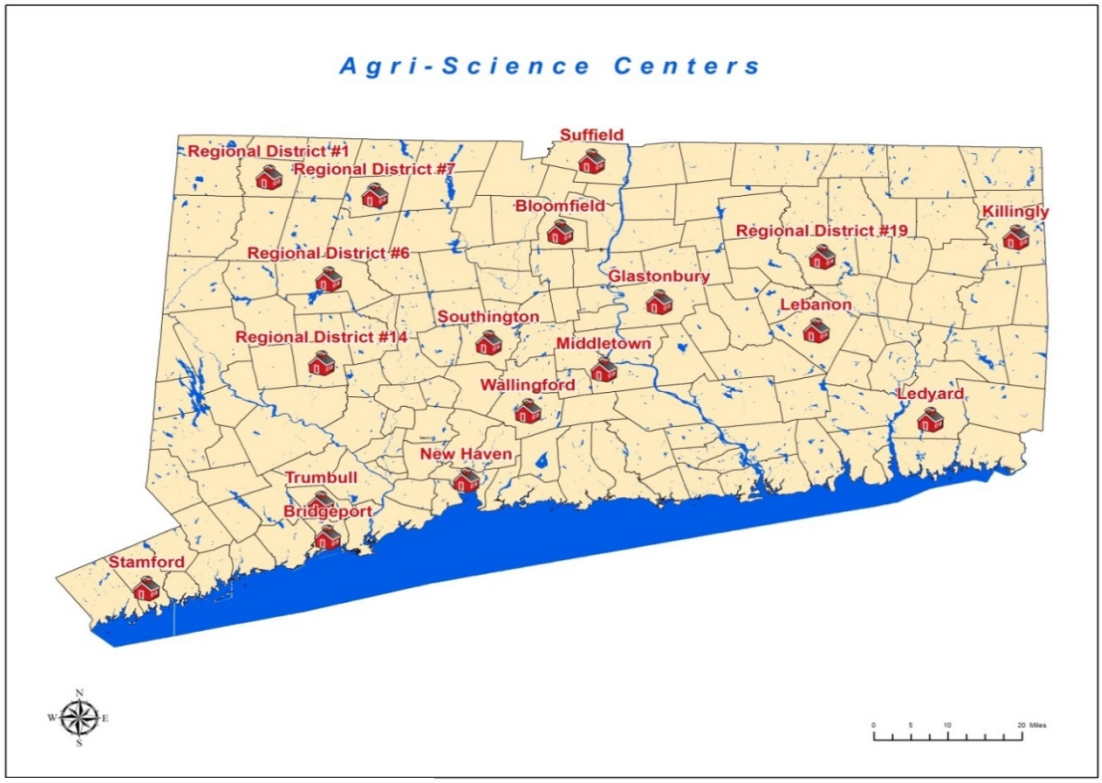
[22] It would be very rare to see town residents voting unanimously for or against a region's budget, but recent results suggest it is somewhat common that a budget referendum with split results among towns and that the result in those cases relies on the results in the town with the largest population.

Appendix I

Additional Information about Agri-Science Centers

This appendix show a map of the location of the agri-science centers, and a table with a listing of the sending school districts for each center (Table I-1). There is also information on model agri-science programs in other states.

Figure I-1. Locations of Agri-Science Centers



Source: PRI staff.

Model Programs in Other States

Connecticut and six other states are members of the northeast region of the National Association of Agricultural Educators.[1] Similar to Massachusetts and New Jersey, Connecticut focuses it agricultural programs at the high school level and does not incorporate agricultural programs at the middle school level (Table I-2). While Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey also have similar student:teacher ratios, Connecticut has relatively more students and teachers in its agriculture programs.

[1] The national Association of Agricultural Educators is a federal advocacy group of state agricultural educators, with over 7,800 members across 24 states. Members are affiliated with middle schools, high schools, or postsecondary schools, and include state and national leaders in agricultural education. www.naae.org.

Table I-1: School Districts with Agreements to Send Students to Agri-Science and Technology Centers

School District with Agri-Science Center	Sending School Districts[a]
Bridgeport	Fairfield, Milford, Monroe, Shelton, Stratford, Trumbull
Regional District No. 14 (Woodbury)	Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethany, Bethel, Bethlehem, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Litchfield, Middlebury, Naugatuck, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Oxford, Prospect, Roxbury, Seymour, Sherman, Southbury, Washington, Watertown, Woodbury
New Haven	Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethany, Branford, Cheshire, Clinton, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Killingworth, Madison, Middlebury, New Haven, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Orange, Prospect, Seymour, Southbury, West Haven, Wethersfield, Woodbridge
Wallingford	Branford, Cheshire, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Meriden, North Branford, North Haven, Orange, West Haven
Ledyard	East Lyme/Salem, Groton, Lisbon, Lyme/Old Lyme, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Norwich, Preston, Stonington, Waterford
Trumbull	Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Milford, Monroe, Orange, Shelton, Stratford
Regional District No. 1 (Canaan)	Canaan, Cornwall, Kent, North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon, Torrington, Out of State (From Massachusetts)
Regional District No. 6 (Litchfield)	Burlington, Goshen, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, Plymouth, Thomaston, Torrington, Warren
Southington	Berlin, Bristol, Cheshire, Farmington, New Britain, Plainville, Terryville, Waterbury, Wolcott
Killingly	Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Griswold, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson, Voluntown, Woodstock
Regional District No. 19 (Mansfield)	Ashford, Columbia, Coventry, Mansfield, Willington, Windham
Glastonbury	Andover, East Hartford (part-time program), Hartford, Hebron, Manchester, Marlborough, Newington, Wethersfield, Windsor (part-time program)
Regional District No. 7 (Winchester)	Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, Hartland, New Hartford, Norfolk, Torrington, Winchester
Stamford	Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Ridgefield, Stamford, Weston, Westport, Wilton
Suffield	Canton, East Granby, Enfield, Granby, Hartford, Hartland, Simsbury, Windsor Locks
Bloomfield	East Granby (part-time program), Hartford, West Hartford (part-time program)
Middletown	Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Hampton, Essex, Guilford, Haddam, Killingworth, Madison, Middlefield, Portland, Old Saybrook, Rocky Hill, Westbrook
Lebanon	Andover, Baltic, Bozrah, Canterbury, Chaplin, Colchester, Columbia, Franklin, Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough, Salem, Scotland, Sprague
Vernon	Bolton, East Windsor, Ellington, Manchester, South Windsor, Stafford, Tolland, Union

[a]Sending school districts based on 2014 enrollments.

Table I-2: Number of Agriculture Students and Teachers in Select Northeast States: 2014

State	Number of Students	Number of Agriculture Teachers	Student: Teacher Ratio	Number of Agricultural Education Programs in:	
				Middle Schools	High Schools
Connecticut	3,350	111	30:1	0	20
Delaware[a]	10,026	70	143:1	13	25
Massachusetts	1,941	81	24:1	0	16
Maryland[a]	4,750	78	61:1	1	56
New Jersey	2,600	60	43:1	0	43
Pennsylvania[a]	16,000	242	66:1	3	163
Virginia	33,000	330	100:1	62	205

[a]Number of students combines students in both middle school and high school agricultural education programs.
Source: National Association of Agricultural Educators website (www.naae.org)

As members of the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), these states all follow the same three component program model: 1) classroom, laboratory and field instruction; 2) supervised agricultural experience; and 3) National FFA Organization leadership training. Annually, NAAE selects six agricultural education programs for *Outstanding Middle/Secondary Agricultural Education Program Awards*. Program features of two recent award recipients from the northeast region are now described.

Virginia. In 2014, the Appomattox County High School Agricultural Education Program in Virginia received an outstanding program award from NAAE. Features of the program include a simulation exercise where students in an agriculture production class get the feel for what it is like to run their own crop farm by maintaining test plots, choosing plants for desired traits, keeping records, maintaining balance sheets and cash flow statements, and employing pesticide safety/management programs. Another feature of the Appomattox County high school program is the course pathway for students with special needs, providing experiential instruction to develop skill sets for careers after high school.

New York. In 2013, the Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Central School Agricultural Education Program in Verona, New York received an outstanding program award from NAAE. One program strength was considered to be the exploratory nature of the program, where students are exposed to a variety of facets of agriculture including plant science, animal science, agricultural mechanics, food science, and agricultural business. Another feature of the program is the 28-foot mobile trailer used by the students to promote agricultural literacy and awareness.